



Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

Editors' Introduction: Abolition Now

by Robert F. Carley, Stefanie A. Jones, Eero Laine and Chris Alen Sula

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ABSTRACT Cultural studies continues to develop its schools of thought, methodologies, and disciplines that are abolitionist. The articles in this issue encounter cultural studies across a range of sites: India, Spain, China, the US, and other geographies. It points toward the importance of cultural studies in a variety of contexts, the ways that cultural studies stands as both an intense form of critique and the political possibilities for its enactment as a program of work.

KEYWORDS abolition, cultural studies

It's difficult to write this introduction during the Covid-19 pandemic. As editors we are all situated in the US, and from our vantage, so much has shifted and so much has remained devastatingly the same. In many ways, the crises precipitated by the pandemic have revealed the political perversions of the United States's cross-class alliances in the defense of racial capitalism. These crises are the really-lived conditions of racial capitalism brought to light: the conditions of differentially-distributed life and death born out of an elite, multi-faceted politicization of racial categories, alongside the sustained neoliberal assault on organized labor and the persistent undermining of class consciousness. It is not actually surprising that Trump's grip over his base combined with astroturfed conservative activism led to a "liberation" movement in many states where people insisted on the right to work and consume, elevating "capitalist realism" from an ideological pathology infecting the imagination to actual pathology exacerbating the pandemic. A joke circulating in pop culture is deeply resonant, identifying the pandemic's four new classes as: billionaire, Zoom worker, essential worker, and unemployed. Whether through the threat of unemployment that holds "front-line" and "essential" workers hostage, or through the threat of being demoted to essential worker (and thus, risking exposure) that looms behind the massive speed-ups demanded of the remote working class, the brutal premise at the core of capitalism has been laid bare: give your life in sacrifice to the economic status quo.

Of course, for the majority of workers, racial capitalism's brutality has already been murderously evident, as the people's uprisings in response to the murder of George Floyd are but one powerful chorus in a long, drawn-out scream against the disposability of workers' lives. One searches for lessons from the conjuncture leading into neoliberalism: Herbert Marcuse's identification of subaltern groups with the Great Refusals emerging in and around civil rights struggles in the United States; Harry Braverman's accounts of the revolutionary ferments, in the US and across the twentieth century, against the automation of labor; Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri's writing about the refusal of work as a strategy for the factory floor born, in part, out of the work of the Johnson Forest Tendency which became the Chicago-based News and Letters Committee; Alfred Sohn-Rethel's accounts of the coordinated and strategic slow-downs as counter-norms to systems of production

norms and standards designed to speed human labor power into a machine-like frenzy of activity. While we can learn from the past, we also need new action for the present. Disability justice movements, always already anti-capitalist movements that attend to the body, offer us ideological shifts from political organizing and/as lived experience:

"No body is disposable."¹

"What our bodies, my mother's and yours and mine, require in order to thrive, is what the world requires."²

"Where life is precious, life is precious."³

Yet rather than refuse work⁴ the insistence on it (the identification of work with life itself, and/or the identification of work for those in service industries as worth more than life itself) by much of Trump's base and the vast middle ground taking a casual or antagonistic approach to public safety gives rise to strange biopolitical meshes, twisting *homo faber* into a ghoulishly unrecognizable category with murderous urgency. We cannot wait for neoliberalism to stare itself down in the mirror and recognize that it has produced an underfunded and ineffective state, that its institutions depend on an always-already hierarchical and ineffectual market, that its infectious consumption of goods and services is concomitant with the spread of infection. No more time for navel-gazing compromise with capitalism. Abolition is, has long been, the necessary alternative. Abolition now.

And so the people's uprisings continue to demand, even as we go to publication. Here's to cultural studies continuing to develop its schools of thought, methodologies, and disciplines that are abolitionist. The articles in this issue encounter cultural studies across a range of sites: India, Spain, China, the US, and other geographies. It points toward the importance of cultural studies in a variety of contexts, the ways that cultural studies stands as both an intense form of critique and the political possibilities for its enactment as a program of work.

Swapna Gopinath's "Manifestations of Microfascism in Spatial Dimensions: A Study on Mumbai's Public Spaces < <https://csalateral.org/issue/9-1/manifestations-microfascism-spatial-dimensions-mumbai-public-spaces-gopinath/> > " examines urban India under neoliberalism and the repressive features of city life that are embedded into everyday life. Mumbai serves as a particularly rich site for the examination of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of microfascism and the development of control societies. Gopinath's analysis develops through attention to public space and private desire and opens toward the possibilities for resistance and subversion, asking us to consider Mumbai as a case study for larger theoretical and political concerns.

In "Muslim Voices, Moorish Masks: Theoretical Perspectives on Music and Islam in Southern Spain < <https://csalateral.org/issue/9-1/muslim-voices-moorish-masks-music-islam-southern-spain-oberlander/> > n < <https://csalateral.org/wp/wp-admin/post.php?post=6523&action=edit> > ," Brian Oberlander interrogates how a "Moorish legacy" (a construction that refers to the diverse people, practices, and political formations of medieval Iberia that coincided with eight centuries of Islam) evoked through musical performance can be understood as fracturing and disrupting present-day Andalusian civic discourse, even as it seems to contribute to its reproduction through musical performances and heritage festivals. Oberlander reads Bhabha's interpretation of Fanon into the theoretical debates around the concept of hybridity in both postcolonial theory

and studies of music. Oberlander argues that that an agile, situational application of the concept to Muslim musical performance in Andalusia enables us to trace the supple ethnographic contours and the diffuse political consequences of cultural difference as performed, experienced, and exploited in the field. By focusing on musical performances, Oberlander's work theorizes the effects of Islam in Andalusian civic discourse contributing to a larger dialogue in Hispanic studies and Spanish cultural studies about how, where, and in what way evocations of the past are experienced in the present.

Lateral is also pleased to publish "Political Power and the Industrial Development of Cultural Artifacts in China < <https://csalateral.org/issue/9-1/political-power-industrial-development-cultural-artifacts-china-liu/>>," the 2019 Randy Martin winning essay, authored by Chang Liu. The article examines the production of cultural products in two provinces in China, offering a financial and political analysis that develops a critical understanding of economic and cultural policy. Liu's work uncovers the productive logics in a particular sector of manufacturing that affords a view of the mechanisms that span the factory and cultural understandings of the materials they produce.

Kourtney Maison and Katelyn Brooks continue *Lateral's* Years in Cultural Studies < <https://csalateral.org/years/>> project, with "Alliances from the Rubble: Cultural Studies in the Year 1990 < <https://csalateral.org/section/years-in-cultural-studies/1990-alliances-from-the-rubble-maison-brooks/>>." Maison and Brooks unpack a notable year of cultural studies work that marks a major transition, not only from one decade to the next, but also as a hinge between old and new forms of global politics. The article offers numerous entry points to further cultural studies, encouraging scholars and activists to consider the functions of cultural studies as an academic discipline and political practice.

This issue also features a special section on US Gun Culture < <https://csalateral.org/archive/forum/gun-culture/>>, edited by Lindsay Livingston and Alex Trimble Young. The forum features four meditations on US gun culture, including Chad Kautzer < <https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/introduction-performance-racial-sovereignty-livingston-young/>>'s essay on theories of the sovereign subject, Caroline Light < <https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/introduction-performance-racial-sovereignty-livingston-young/>>'s work on the NRA and commodity fetishism, Alex Trimble Young < <https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/introduction-performance-racial-sovereignty-livingston-young/>>'s consideration of necropolitics and guns, and Lindsay Livingston < <https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/introduction-performance-racial-sovereignty-livingston-young/>>'s critique of the anti-black ideologies that underwrite much of the thinking around guns and gun rights in the US today. The forum is written through with contemporary and historical examples of the ways that gun culture has shaped the political landscape of the United States.

While *Lateral* has long been engaged in conversations oriented towards the deconstruction and destruction of capitalism, white supremacy, ableism, colonialism, and the cis-heteropatriarchy, this issue invites us to continue that work in many ways. Thinking through practices and patterns of violence, histories of cultural transformation, and rhetorical and infrastructural constructions of racial capitalist power and resistance around the world are also conversations linked to abolition. As always, we invite you to work with *Lateral* to continue to grow this project.

Notes

1. Coined by Patty Berne of Sins Invalid, this slogan rejects the bodily impacts of ableism, racism, colonialism, fatphobia, capitalism, and the patriarchy. It was taken up again in 2019 by Max Airborne, Stacey Milbern, and Dawn Haney, as part of Fat Rose and Disability Justice Culture Club actions to close ICE detention centers. In 2020, it was part of a campaign against triage discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic, and its use has grown from there. Max Airborne, personal email message to authors, June 26, 2020. [↗](#)
 2. Aurora Levins Morales, *Kindling: Writings on the Body* (Cambridge, MA: Palabrer Press, 2013): 10. [↗](#)
 3. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "The Case for Prison Abolition: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on COVID-19, Racial Capitalism, and Decarceration," interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now!* May 5, 2020, video, https://www.democracynow.org/2020/5/5/ruth_wilson_gilmore_abolition_coronavirus <https://www.democracynow.org/2020/5/5/ruth_wilson_gilmore_abolition_coronavirus> [↗](#)
 4. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) [↗](#)
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Author Information

Robert F. Carley

Robert F. Carley is Associate Professor of International Studies at Texas A&M University, College Station.

[View all of Robert F. Carley's articles.](#)

Stefanie A. Jones

SAJ is a McNair scholar, an organizer, and an educator, and received their doctorate from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. SAJ has published in edited collections and *Theatre Journal* and has taught at Brooklyn College, Hunter College, the College of Staten Island, Marymount Manhattan College, and New York University. SAJ's research explores policing, war, white supremacy, twenty-first century capitalist economies, gender, disability, and the connections between class formation and political practice.

[View all of Stefanie A. Jones's articles.](#)

Eero Laine

Eero Laine is an Assistant Professor at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York.

[View all of Eero Laine's articles.](#)

Chris Alen Sula

Chris Alen Sula is Associate Professor at Pratt Institute's School of Information. His research explores the digital humanities as a field, including curricula, the early history of DH, and disciplinarity. He has also published on citation studies in the humanities, the politics of technology, and ethical uses of data and visualization.

[View all of Chris Alen Sula's articles.](#)

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Muslim Voices, Moorish Masks: Theoretical Perspectives on Music and Islam in Southern Spain

by Brian Oberlander | Articles, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT This article proposes a new theoretical framework for the study of music and Islam in Andalusia, southern Spain. I demonstrate the framework's potential by applying it to collaborative musical performances among Muslim economic migrants, European converts to Islam, and non-Muslim Andalusians during a year-long heritage festival that celebrated the region's medieval Islamic past, arguing that musical analysis opens fresh lines of inquiry into the expression and experience of Muslim subjectivity in Andalusia. In the process, I engage with theoretical debates on hybridity in anthropology and ethnomusicology, orienting my own perspective along the axis of performativity, while in dialogue with Hispanic studies and Spanish cultural studies I think along the borders between hybridity and hauntology to recalibrate discussions of Spanish historical memory for a theoretical framework that ultimately coalesces into scenes of Moorishness: crowded, contested scenes in which musicians, festivalgoers, and festival organizers mutually interpellated each other under the rubric of Andalusia's medieval Islamic past.

KEYWORDS hybridity, Islam, migration, music, Spain

Introduction

In the following, I outline a theoretical framework for the study of music and Islam in Andalusia, southern Spain. Drawing on five years of ethnography (2013–2018), I apply this framework to hybrid musical performances that occurred within the context of Andalusian heritage festivals and cultural tourism. As a case study, I offer detailed analysis of a performance that took place at the Millennial of the Kingdom of Granada, an elaborate year-long heritage festival inspired by the city's founding as an Islamic *ṭāifa* state in 1013 CE. In this overdetermined context—replete with bodies in motion and voices raised in song, hybrid musical aesthetics invoking Andalusia's medieval Islamic past, and institutional patrons entangling this Moorish heritage with neoliberal civic discourses of the present—musical analysis opens fresh lines of inquiry into the expression and experience of Muslim subjectivity in Andalusia.

By “Moorish,” I refer to the diverse people, practices, and political formations of medieval Iberia that existed under Islamic rule, subject to a succession of Arab and Berber dynasties (collectively, the “Moors”) from the eighth century CE to the fall of Granada in 1492. These eight centuries of Islam in Iberia—beginning and ending in the South, which continues to bear etymological witness in the derivation of “Andalusia” from the Arabic toponym *al-Andalus*—appear memorialized in a vast repertoire of fables and fantasies that have shaped Andalusian regional identity since the early twentieth century.¹ Under the influence

of this widely circulating historiography around the region's Islamic past, Andalusian civic discourse has variously repressed and reproduced the forms of exile, exclusion, and erasure that marked the Moorish era's violent Inquisitorial conclusion—even as Andalusian political institutions have celebrated the remarkable forms of encounter, intimacy, and coexistence (Sp. *convivencia*) that provoked such an anxious end to begin with.²

The Moorish legacy's deep and abiding influence on Andalusian civic discourse is, in fact, one that scholars in Hispanic Studies and Spanish Cultural Studies have long attempted to name and to reckon with.³ Discussing historical tourism in the city of Cordoba, Elena Arigita has posed an instructive series of questions on this topic: "However, how is this evocation of the past experienced in the city itself? How is the 'Spirit of Cordoba' mobilised, who promotes it . . . for what purpose and with what results? And most especially, do areas of shadow, silences and oblivions exist in this celebration of the past?"⁴ To these vital questions I add another: what happens when this evocation of the Moorish past occurs through musical performance?

To interrogate the complex space in which musical expressions and experiences of Islam emerged at Andalusian heritage festivals, I read Homi Bhabha's reading of Frantz Fanon along the axis of performativity, adapting resources from Anthropology, Ethnomusicology, and Performance Studies to approximate the sonorous, intersubjective citations of the Moorish legacy that mutually interpellated musicians, festivalgoers, and festival organizers within the interstices between Islamic and Andalusian, past and present, self and other. In the process, I engage with theoretical debates on hybridity—both musical and postcolonial—arguing that an agile, situational application of the concept to Muslim musical performance in Andalusia enables us to trace the supple ethnographic contours and the diffuse political consequences of cultural difference as performed, experienced, and exploited in the field.

In dialogue with previous work in Hispanic Studies and Spanish Cultural Studies, where scholars have developed deconstructive readings of the Moorish legacy via Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, and Avery Gordon,⁵ I also think along the borders between hybridity and hauntology to recalibrate discussions of Spanish historical memory for a theoretical framework that ultimately coalesces into *scenes of Moorishness*: crowded, contested scenes in which musicians, festivalgoers, and festival organizers inhabited the Moorish legacy's haunted temporality so as to produce a curious quasi-*caesura*—interrupting, and by interrupting, sustaining the time of an Andalusian civic discourse that thrived on the ambivalence of its transhistorical, transnational Islamic heritage.

The Field: Hearing Music and Islam in Andalusia

I encountered many of my field contacts through participant-observation, which included private lessons on the *'ūd* (a fretless lute played across the southern and eastern Mediterranean); language classes in dialectical Moroccan Arabic; and flamenco dance lessons in both group and private settings. I also prepared meals, organized film screenings, and participated in public protests with the pro-migrant NGO Granada Acoge.⁶ Interviews, both structured and unstructured, were often conducted over steaming pots of mint tea at Andalusia's characteristic Moorish tearooms (*teterías*), while other conversations took place across oceans—over the phone, via Skype and WhatsApp—as

our relationships continued to develop virtually. With the exception of public officials and institutional spokespersons, I refer to my field contacts with pseudonyms.

My on-site fieldwork began in Granada before expanding to include Cordoba and Seville, bustling urban centers with Muslim populations comprising economic migrants—mostly from West Africa and the Maghreb, including an especially large Moroccan community—as well as a smaller community of Andalusian, Spanish, and northern European converts to Islam.⁷ My Muslim field contacts espoused diverse conceptions of Islam and varying degrees of religious observance. Those who prayed regularly did so in spaces ranging from the Grand Mosque of Granada—an artful building of relatively recent construction, nestled in the verdant hillside of Granada’s historical Moorish Quarter—to fairly nondescript storefronts and other preexisting urban spaces that Muslims had repurposed for prayer.⁸

Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar has identified a certain socio-economic stratification in attendance and access to these diverse places of worship, sustained by an “unequal multiculturalism” in which Andalusia’s Moorish legacy effectively racialized the Islam of economic migrants—as the Islam of the *moro*, a slur conflating present-day Muslims with medieval Moorish conquerors—while nevertheless assimilating the Islam of non-migrant converts as an index of the Moorish era’s fabled religious diversity.⁹ This applied to my field contacts as well: musical collaborations between Muslim economic migrants and religious converts, often promoted in an ardent language of artistic exchange and cultural encounter, occurred within the context of severe socio-economic and political disparities between their communities. Ahmed, a British convert who sang and played violin in a Sufi fusion ensemble of his own founding, was intensely aware that his experience of musical performance in Granada differed from that of many Moroccan musicians with whom he collaborated:

There are so many great Moroccan musicians in Granada. A lot of those musicians have had to look for other jobs, but for the most part Moroccans are extremely resourceful. Our *qānūn* [zither] player, who’s a great master, he works in a clothing store shifting boxes around. He’s got a life here, but if he was in Morocco he could be a teacher in a conservatoire. Just an example.¹⁰

There were, however, striking exceptions to this trend. Munir, a Moroccan musician in his thirties who owned a small tearoom in Granada’s Moorish Quarter, offered an effusive account of music and migration that celebrated his musical practice as a source of social capital—all the while, quietly playing melodies of Moroccan classical music on his *ūd*:

In Granada there is an atmosphere of music, an atmosphere of artists, and of poets as well. A lot of poets come to see me, and I go with them to play the *ūd* while they recite their poetry, and they know me very well. A lot of poets, and women singers, and men singers, and the truth is: I feel good here in Granada because I know everyone and they value my work and my career here. I am well here.¹¹

I suggest that the study of specifically musical interactions between migrants and converts could offer unique perspectives on the complex triangulation of migrant, convert, and non-Muslim identities that Rogozen-Soltar’s research has documented.¹² It is worth considering, for example, that performances generally took shape through an intimate, ever-shifting network of musical groups that drew migrant, convert, and non-Muslim musicians together around institutional patrons: municipal governments, local universities,

and museums as in the case study below. Entering differently into these spaces of patronage, musicians nevertheless collaborated in performing Islam under the disciplinary gaze of Andalusian civic institutions that mutually interpellated them via the Moorish legacy.

Most of my Muslim field contacts had connections to Islamic cultural associations that hosted musical performances as well, some attached to local mosques and some bearing affiliations with international Sufi orders like the Naqshbandi-Haqqani. Rogozen-Soltar has observed that converts in Granada were more likely to embrace Sufism than economic migrants.¹³ This was certainly the case in my experience, however migrant musicians often pursued the opportunities for performance that abounded in this influential sector of Andalusian Islam. Music traced routes of internal migration for economic migrants and religious converts alike, travelling as they did between the urban centers featured in this article and a network of rural Islamic communities (*alquerías*) like the vibrant Sufi village at Orgiva, located forty miles south of Granada on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada, or the Alquería de Rosales, an Islamic retreat in the town of Puebla de Don Fadrique some one hundred miles northeast of the city.

Musical performance thus brought migrant and convert musicians into sustained, ambivalent collaborations within shared spaces of prayer, sociability, and remuneration, which in turn shaped their interactions with Catholic and secular Andalusians. For that matter, my non-Muslim Andalusian field contacts invoked the Moorish past as frequently as their Muslim collaborators, mostly drawing on the language of Andalusian cultural institutions and, with varying degrees of reflexivity, leveraging this shared Islamic heritage in order to calibrate their relationships with Muslim musicians.¹⁴ It is against this background of Muslim being and belonging in Andalusia—intersectional, intersubjective, and permeated by citations of the Moorish legacy—that Muslim subjectivities emerged through musical performance.

Case Study: "Lights of Ancient Light"

On a summer's evening in June 2013, a crowd of approximately two hundred gathers before a modest festival stage in Plaza Nueva, a public square that marks the boundary between Granada's gleaming city center and the labyrinth of narrow cobblestone alleyways in the historical Moorish Quarter of the Albaicín. Visible in the distance, crowning a grove of cypress trees that adorns the hillside east of Plaza Nueva, are the towers of the Alhambra. The most visible, known as Torre de la Vela, appears to qualify the monument's Islamic heritage with a cathedral bell, imported from Castile in the late fifteenth century by the victorious Catholic Monarchs, along with an anxious flurry of flags announcing the Alhambra's current geopolitical location within four modern territories: Granada, Andalusia, Spain, and the European Union. Directly behind the stage, facing the Alhambra from below, is the Supreme Court of Andalusia, an imposing Renaissance structure replete with iron-studded doorways and grandiose Corinthian columns.

Musicians provide the soundtrack to a video projected above the stage. The protagonist wanders through spaces emblematic of Andalusia's medieval Moorish past: now observing the florid fixtures of the Alhambra with a longing, lingering gaze, now looking out across the Strait of Gibraltar toward the Moroccan coast. A voice representing Zawi ibn Ziri, the

Berber chief who founded Granada as a *ṭāifa* in the early eleventh century, interjects to powerfully affirm the millennial claims of his Berber dynasty:

But today, the 15th of June of 1013, at the entrance to *Gharnāṭa*, we will write a destiny other than our relegation to errant executioners, because our peace will be invincible, and we will create a kingdom of water and myrtle, of fertile orchards and paradises, where we will watch our children grow and our women smile. And this land, which we have won from the clutches of predators, will infuse our shadows with light: light of ancient light. . . .¹⁵

Below the video projection, a vocalist begins to sing medieval Arabic verse in modern Spanish translation to an uncanny accompaniment of Iberian, North African, West African, and Middle Eastern musical instruments: the percussive strumming of flamenco guitar mingles with the sparkling buzz of the *saz*, a Turkish long-necked lute, as a *kamanja*, or violin played with Arab technique, subtly echoes and embellishes the vocalist's melody; the hollow patter of a flamenco *cajón*, or box drum, lays a complex rhythmic foundation in dialogue with the West African *djembe*. While the video continues to play above, two dancers emerge from the wings to lavish this multimedia production with the spectacle of bodies in motion. One dances flamenco, the other performs an historical reconstruction of Moorish dance overlaid on belly dance (*raqṣ sharqī*), at first moving together in joyous consort, then circling each other competitively – all the while subtly incorporating gestures from one choreography into the other. My field contacts would generally describe this music as *la fusión flamenco-árabe*: flamenco-Arab fusion.

At the apex of this performance, the dancers coax a Moroccan poet and professor of Arabic into center-stage for an impromptu trio. Devoid of choreography, the professor inhabits the spotlight anxiously, clinging to the professional dancers who flank him. Yet his body is garbed in the soft white *djellaba* (hooded robe) and bright yellow *babouches* (leather slippers) that so potently visualize Moroccanness, and his role has thus far been to recite medieval Hispano-Arab poetry between the musical numbers of this performance. Now, as he moves within a dense agglomeration of musical, textual, and choreographic codes emanating from both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar, he elicits a riotous round of applause from the crowd. Having spoken from among the ruins of a filmic Moorish era, the voice of Zawi ibn Ziri is finally enveloped within a haze of hybrid musical aesthetics and live, fleshly presence in the performance space below the video projection. While the ambiguous figure of this Zirid Dynasty ruler haunted the stage as a specter of Granada's medieval Moorish past, the ensemble staged him ambiguously in the present, transforming Plaza Nueva into a striking scene of Moorishness.

This performance, titled *Luces de antigua luz* ("Lights of Ancient Light"), formed part of the Millennial of the Kingdom of Granada: a year-long heritage festival to commemorate the city's eleventh-century Islamic founding. The Millennial was overseen by a consortium of Spanish national, Andalusian regional, Granadan municipal, and six Andalusian provincial governments, with the Andalusian Minister of Health, Social Welfare, & Equality serving as chair. Registered with UNESCO's Anniversary Program for the year 2012–2013 and receiving financial support from the EU's Regional Development Fund, the festival also garnered corporate sponsorship ranging from Iberia Airlines to the Spanish telecommunications company Telefónica. Representatives of the Moorish Legacy Foundation (*Fundación El Legado Andalusí*), a cultural organization attached to the Andalusian Ministry of Culture, worked to organize activities on the ground.

Arriving for a private tour of the Moorish Legacy Foundation's headquarters, which at the time comprised a wing of the local Museum of Science & Industry, I was struck by an exhibit on the first floor that beckoned to visitors with recordings of Moroccan classical music. This was not an exhibit on music in *al-Andalus*, however, nor on any theme relating to medieval Hispano-Arab civilization, but rather a comprehensive survey of nation-states in the contemporary Arab world: demographics, political systems, currency, culture, and topography from Morocco to Oman. Here, the Moorish legacy appeared to authenticate a display of knowledge—encyclopedic knowledge intended to render the whole of Arab civilization accessible within the Foundation's headquarters—while Moroccan classical music, widely believed to originate in medieval Iberia, provided an uncanny soundtrack that keyed visitors into the millennial prehistory of Hispano-Arab encounters behind this jarring act of surveillance.

Once the tour had officially begun, a member of the programming committee explained that the Millennial would convert Granada's Moorish heritage into a platform for local economic and commercial interests: in fact, the consortium had earmarked the festival's projected revenue for ambitious public works projects, from the construction of a Metro system to the revitalization of the Albaicín neighborhood.¹⁶ She emphasized, however, that the Millennial's activities were also aimed at Arab and Muslim diplomatic partners across the Mediterranean, including Morocco in particular, through the mobilization of a shared Islamic heritage that would bind these territories into relations of exchange and cooperation.¹⁷

It appeared that the Millennial's Moorish-themed agenda was meant to invest Granada with the diplomatic leverage of a transnational Islamic past and the timely allure of a progressive multicultural present.¹⁸ Indeed the watchword throughout the festival, ubiquitous in promotional materials and introductory speeches, was *convivencia* (Sp. "coexistence"). Outlined in the mid-twentieth century by Spanish philologist Américo Castro, this concept evokes a celebratory vision of coexistence among the Moorish era's multifarious racial, religious, and political communities—often condensed into the tidy formulation *las tres culturas* ("the three cultures"), which refers broadly to Christians, Jews, and Muslims.¹⁹ It was in this overdetermined, festivalized context that *Lights of Ancient Light* and other hybrid musical performances occurred.

When the Berber chief's presence was finally made manifest through the insertion of a hypervisibilized Moroccan body into the hybrid aesthetics of this performance, *Lights of Ancient Light* generated a scene of embodiment and performativity in which Muslims were interpellated as instantiations of Andalusian social ideals, economic imperatives, and diplomatic agendas—that is, assimilated into a neoliberal system of capital, regionalism, and diplomacy which the figure of the medieval multicultural Moor effectively indexed. Yet the Zirid's indignant opening narration had been laced with potent allusions to exile, exclusion, and erasure ("we will write a destiny other than our relegation to errant executioners"), while studies by Rogozen-Soltar et al. had revealed an atmosphere of anxious, xenophobic responses to both Islam and migration which my fieldwork seemed to confirm.

It was during an autumn revival of *Lights of Ancient Light*, in fact, that Andalusian media were covering a controversial proposal to reinstall barbed wire along the border between Morocco and the Spanish enclave of Melilla, where the Spanish national government was attempting to control migration from across the Strait. The first set of *cuchillas* ("blades"), installed in 2005 and removed in 2007 under pressure from human rights organizations,

appeared constantly in the local media. Many reports featured images of the deep red gashes that the *cuchillas* had torn in dark African skin, lending well-worn political considerations a gruesome ethical immediacy.²⁰

At the center of this controversy were migrants from West Africa, mostly young men from Senegal and Nigeria. Yet the border itself lay restless within the contested territory of Melilla: this Spanish enclave on the northern coast of Morocco, like its counterpart Ceuta some three hundred miles to the west, troubled Hispano-Moroccan relations with the vestiges of Spanish colonialism and an influx of primarily Moroccan migrants from across the Strait. West Africans rendered the border visible in their sensational attempts to cross it, crowding together into desperate bands of hundreds and scaling the fences *en masse*, some straddling the top just beyond arm's reach of the border patrol. Their presence in Andalusia, however, which includes vibrant West African social collectives and cultural organizations, was often reduced in the media to those moments of poverty and abjection in which young black Africans became fixtures on street corners, begging for spare euros and peddling miscellaneous wares to passersby.²¹

Lights of Ancient Light is instructive in this respect as well, as it reveals still further complexities in the demographics of Andalusian Islam, along with the expression and reception of Muslim subjectivities through musical performance. While the Moroccan professor was compelled to inhabit center-stage for impromptu dancing, a Senegalese musician continued to play *djembe* and *darbūka* (West African and Middle Eastern drums, respectively) in the background. Moussa, who identified as Muslim, had arrived in Granada from Dakar fifteen years prior. After securing documentation and working periodically in construction, he connected with other Senegalese musicians to found the social and musical collective Roots Africa Percussion, hosting workshops on West African drumming and speaking at public forums on migrant rights.

Moussa's perspectives on music, migration, and the Moorish legacy, discussed below, encoded robust claims to livable space, however my impression during the concert was of a black African voice effectively subsumed under the Arab and Mediterranean valences that only a dancing Moroccan body could lend the medieval Moor. While West Africans were sensationally visible astride the border fences at Melilla, on the Andalusian festival stage they were sights unseen. This maverick performance of Moorishness thus raised a number of urgent ethical questions, only to reinscribe them within the festivalized framework of the Millennial. And yet my Muslim field contacts appeared to thrive in the interstices within the Moorish legacy that heritage festivals like the Millennial opened up, continually entering into and exiting discursive fissures as they sought to revise and reframe its significance. In the following section, I engage with postcolonial formulations of hybridity to theorize the emergence of Muslim subjectivity within these crowded, contested, and deeply ambivalent scenes of musical performance.

Hybridity in Moorish Musical Performance

The rhetorical antithesis featured in this article's title is adapted from that of Frantz Fanon's influential treatise *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).²² Fanon's title was a compelling shorthand for his socio-psychological diagnosis of colonialism, wherein colonized people of color experienced their subjectivities vis-à-vis the ideals and institutions of European colonizers. Following his inspiration, I have set the images of

Muslim voices and Moorish masks alongside each other to evoke an intimate, ambivalent interplay between daily experiences of Islam in Andalusia and the complex of Andalusian social discourses, cultural policies, and institutional agendas that refracted Muslim subjectivities through the region's medieval Islamic past. I focus particularly on a special case: those moments in which Muslim musicians emerged from work, play, and prayer to voice sophisticated claims to livable space in Andalusian cities by manipulating musical codes of past and present, self and other, Islamic and Andalusian.²³

In this respect, I invoke Fanon closer to the point at which Homi Bhabha begins to read his work, cautiously following Bhabha to "the edge of things," or into that liminal space of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence that he saw opening up at the extremes of Fanon's maverick thinking.²⁴ I describe the musical performances below as hybrid, in part, to place my research in dialogue with this tradition of postcolonial critique, in the process also hoping to join conversations on hybridity among scholars in Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies, and Ethnomusicology.

In Bhabha's well-known formulation, hybridity begins from the premise that identities are mutable and processual. It also names a condition, exemplified by the fraught cultural encounters of colonialism and globalization, in which identities emerge through tandem, entangled articulations of difference—difference produced in its very articulation, so that subjects mutually constitute and indefinitely defer one another in "a complex, on-going negotiation."²⁵ In this respect, hybridity usefully describes the condition in which Muslim musicians expressed and experienced their subjectivities in contemporary urban Andalusia. Muslim difference, as an agglomeration of religious, racial, and cultural valences, was constantly articulated in moments of contact between Muslim economic migrants, religious converts, and Catholic or secular Andalusians who gathered around the region's medieval Moorish past. Muslim subjectivity was hybrid, that is, in the sense of being generated through an endless series of tandem, entangled articulations of difference within a liminal space between Islamic and Andalusian. I also suggest that this liminal space—crowded, contested, and deeply ambivalent—constituted a "third" space within which my field contacts fractured Andalusian civic discourse and outlined alternative models of Muslim subjectivity, just as Bhabha suggests that minoritarian subjects might forge alternative, potentially subversive identities in those provocative moments between self and other that inspire his political project.²⁶

Moroccan migrant musicians, for their part, emerged as Muslim others in the process of performing musical repertoires that indexed genealogical descendancy from the Moriscos, or those medieval Iberian Muslims forcibly converted to Catholicism and then expelled *en masse* following the Christian Reconquest.²⁷ Significant numbers of Moriscos fled to northern Morocco in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, establishing distinctive "Andalusian" communities there.²⁸ Many of my Moroccan field contacts invoked this Morisco genealogy by way of reframing their migration into contemporary Andalusia as, effectively, repatriation into Moorish *al-Andalus*.

Usama, a Moroccan musician, luthier, educator, and entrepreneur, explained over tea in his workshop that the lower Albaicín, or that section of Granada's historical Moorish Quarter evoking the North African *souq*, seemed familiar to him upon his arrival from Tétouan two decades prior. He began by citing the architecture, the climate, and eventually the music, noting that Moroccan classical repertoires (often the "Arab" component of flamenco-Arab fusion projects) had their origins in the resplendent courts of medieval *al-Andalus*—the

sonorous legacy of Granada's Moorish past, preserved in exile across the Strait of Gibraltar following the expulsions of the Reconquest.²⁹

Explaining that his ancestry was "of *al-Andalus*" on his mother's side, Usama concluded our visit by telling the story of meeting his wife in Granada: a story of "two loves," as he put it, since he discovered her precisely "in these surroundings, enchanted by the Alhambra and the Albaicín."³⁰ Framed in this way, Usama's musical activities generated a liminal, livable space between past and present, Andalusian self and Islamic other by performing narratives of affective attachment to particular Andalusian locales, genealogical attachment to historical Andalusian communities, and aesthetic attachment to Moroccan musical repertoires believed to originate in Andalusia's medieval Islamic past.

Religious converts inhabited this space as well. In fact, many convert musicians outlined ardent connections to Morisco communities, in particular, though they reformulated these connections in a narrative of social and spiritual affinities rather than genealogical descendancy. When I met British convert Ahmed in a tearoom near the Grand Mosque of Granada, he was composing a song inspired by an Islamic devotional poem discovered within the walls of an old Morisco home. Typical of Morisco manuscripts, which hailed from a time of Reconquest and Inquisition, the poem's reverent praise of the Prophet appeared in the covert language of *Aljamiado*, a blend of Spanish and Arabic transliterated in Arabic script. Introducing a performance with his Sufi fusion ensemble on a spring evening in 2014, seated in the gardens of the Grand Mosque of Granada, Ahmed dedicated the song to "all those Moriscos who suffered here and could not practice their religion in public."³¹

A music video produced later that year begins by showing Ahmed in the Alhambra and the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba as the Morisco poem is sung to a plaintive melody, yet following a pause in the music and time-lapse imagery of sunrise in Granada, the video concludes with *al-Fiyachiya*: a devotional poem of the same historical period as the Morisco manuscript, but penned by a Sufi mystic of Tétouan and immensely popular in contemporary Morocco. The ensemble having expanded at this point to include flamenco guitar and flute, Ahmed abandons the shadowed corridors of historical monuments for the sunlit streets of the Moorish Quarter, where he embraces fellow converts, speaks with vendors at the outdoor market, and teaches children to play music in a local tearoom. Exchanging the tattered garb of the clandestine, persecuted Morisco for that of the vital, sociable Muslim convert—and subtly intercalating this convert presence into Moroccan genealogical discourse via hybrid, highly intertextual aesthetics—Ahmed, too, claimed livable space in Andalusia through musical performance of the region's Moorish past.

In a phone conversation some years later, reflecting on *Lights of Ancient Light* in retrospect, Senegalese musician Moussa marked out yet another route of affiliation with the Moorish legacy. He once again invoked the Morisco narrative, though not by naming the Moriscos explicitly. Prompted to discuss the Moorish legacy, Moussa instead suggested that the musical practices of Gitanos, or Spanish Roma, "are very similar to Senegalese music." Citing the *jaleo*, or the verbal exclamations of *¡olé!* and such that characterize flamenco, he remembered at length the flamenco styles that appeared alongside Hispano-Arab repertoires in *Lights of Ancient Light* and explained how they reminded him of Senegalese music. He concluded this extensive answer to my question about the Moorish legacy by dwelling on the West African percussion instruments that he performed with Roots Africa Percussion, beyond the scope of flamenco-Arab fusion projects, assuring me: "I have them with me. I have them in my house."³²

In effect, Moussa shifted focus from the Moorish legacy's Arab and Mediterranean valences, emphasizing flamenco over Moroccan classical components of flamenco-Arab fusion and, in the process, outlining affiliations between Senegalese migrants and the disenfranchised Romani community so often credited with flamenco's early development. Connecting with the Moorish legacy in this way, Moussa was subtly intercalating his Senegalese experience of music, migration, and Islam into a narrative of racial and musical hybridity that has structured Andalusian discourse on flamenco since the early twentieth century and which continued to shape the practice of flamenco-Arab fusion in the early twenty-first. Circulating among Muslim and non-Muslim field contacts alike, as well as in the Millennial's promotional materials, this narrative posited that a significant number of Moriscos evaded mass expulsion, fleeing not across the Strait of Gibraltar but rather into the marginalized Gitano communities of rural Andalusia, where their sustained, clandestine influence on Gitano musical practices left traces of Moorish aesthetics in the incipient repertoire of flamenco.³³

One could argue that hybrid musical performances like *Lights of Ancient Light*, setting the Moorish legacy into play, enabled Muslim musicians to formulate subtle, intersecting critiques of Andalusian social and political histories while claiming livable zones within contemporary Andalusian territory. I also suggest, however, that economic migrants and religious converts alike performed Muslim subjectivities within the framework of a Moorish legacy that continually deferred their presence. That Andalusian civic discourse explicitly constructed the Andalusian self as shaped by Islam; and that the Moorish legacy cast Muslim difference into the very heart of Andalusian civic identity as a matter of institutional agendas, cultural policies, and Hispano-Moroccan diplomatic relations, makes the case of Muslim subjectivity in Andalusia especially apt for posing difficult theoretical questions around hybridity.

Morisco narratives circulated alongside historicizing slurs such as *moro* (Sp. "Moor"), which also tactically conflated past and present in order to invest contemporary Muslims with Moorishness. Over coffee with María, a non-Muslim field contact from one of my language classes who regularly traveled to Morocco on business, I mentioned my fieldwork with Moroccan migrants and a concert of Hispano-Arab music that I had attended at the University of Granada the night before—at which point María lowered her voice to inform me that *los moros* were quietly bringing Islam back to the city.³⁴ Performances of affective, aesthetic, and genealogical attachment to Andalusian territory among Muslim musicians, signifying within the ambivalent discursive space of the Moorish legacy, were easily resemanticized as aggressive claims to the region's vast Islamic inheritance.³⁵

Recourse to the Moorish legacy, particularly among Moroccan musicians, was further complicated by the history of Spanish colonialism in Morocco: for economic migrants in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, their grandparents had been colonial subjects under Spanish (and French) rule in the early twentieth, living in a Protectorate that lasted from 1912 to 1956.³⁶ As Eric Calderwood and Susan Martin-Márquez have shown, the Spanish colonial project thrived on claims of cultural affinity between Spain and Morocco, often articulated by invoking the Moorish legacy.³⁷ Andalusia's regional heritage effectively sustained these claims, not least in the impassioned regionalist manifestos of the early twentieth century, where intellectuals like Blas Infante (1885–1936) affirmed deep-seated historical, genealogical, and cultural connections between southern Spain and Morocco even as they decried Andalusia's political disenfranchisement by the central Spanish government. Addressing a notoriously restless Andalusian proletariat as latter-day Moriscos, Infante and others conjured the racial hybridity, religious difference, and

historical oppression of the region's Moorish past in order to invigorate Andalusian demands for independence from Spain.³⁸

Suppressing Andalusian regionalism, framers of Spanish foreign policy would nevertheless rationalize the colonial project in Morocco with citations of this shared Hispano-Moroccan cultural heritage, in the process converting Andalusian cultural discourse into an intermediary between the two territories.³⁹ Both flamenco and Moroccan classical music were implicated in this circuitous colonial gesture. Infante, for his part, had devoted an entire treatise to Andalusian music, arguing that flamenco and Moroccan classical music derived from the same source—Moorish Andalusia—and had developed in parallel on either side of the Strait over the ensuing centuries: flamenco among those Moriscos who took refuge with Andalusian Gitanos, and Moroccan classical music among those Moriscos who fled to North Africa.⁴⁰ As Calderwood has shown, Spanish officials proposed to revive Moroccan classical music within the Protectorate on similar grounds, tracing the repertoire to medieval Andalusia and mobilizing the notion of “a unique, hereditary claim” to this musical heritage—shared by Spaniards and Moroccans, if supposedly neglected by Moroccans prior to the Protectorate—as a platform for intervening in Moroccan musical life: educating and inculcating Moroccan musicians and listeners alike, and ultimately installing an ambivalent reverence for Andalusian culture into the core of modern Moroccan identity.⁴¹

Following Spain's transition to democracy in the 1970s, nearly two decades after the Protectorate's dissolution, an incipient Andalusian government would incorporate language and ideology from these Protectorate-era initiatives into its own cultural policy, and it was precisely at this time that Andalusian flamenco musicians began to collaborate with Moroccan conservatory ensembles on flamenco-Arab fusion projects—generally with zealous institutional patronage from both sides of the Strait.⁴² Indeed, the complex complicity between the Moorish-themed cultural discourses of Andalusian regionalism and Spanish colonialism continued to reverberate at Andalusian heritage festivals and cultural tourism events as of my fieldwork.

Before leaving the Moorish Legacy Foundation's headquarters, I was referred to a special issue of the foundation's quarterly magazine, in this case devoted to the Millennial of the Kingdom of Granada. In her Introduction, the foundation's Director celebrated flamenco-Arab fusion in resonant terms, identifying the aims of both the Millennial generally and of its fusion concerts particularly as that of “setting our common history with Morocco to music.”⁴³ Anticipating that the Millennial's musical programming would enjoy the same enthusiastic reception as previous foundation concerts, Martín Jiménez described a 1997 collaboration between the Andalusian Orchestra of Tétouan and unidentified flamenco musicians that had taken place in Marrakesh, proclaiming: “This music was understood immediately and naturally by the multitude that congregated there, as though they were children of the same mother. Andalusians and Moroccans spoke a common language that evening.”⁴⁴

On one hand, musical performances of Moorishness enabled Muslim migrants to reframe their migration as repatriation and to claim livable space in Andalusia, while on the other it potentially incorporated them into narratives of cultural hybridity that Spanish foreign policy had woven into the fabric of colonial oppression and which the foundational texts of Andalusian regionalism had bequeathed to Andalusian civic discourse. In that light, it is worth considering that Bhabha's formulation of hybridity has been subjected to intense

contestation in diverse disciplinary contexts, often on the grounds of its potential to reinscribe hybrid subjects within hegemonic frameworks of cultural difference.⁴⁵

Robert Young has noted that hybridity bears traces of nineteenth-century social science, which adapted the term from biological contexts and pressed it into the service of problematic racial discourses that were developing along the lines of social Darwinism. Young argues that contemporary formulations of hybridity have failed to outrun this dubious discursive legacy—this “mantle of the past”—and cautions that “without the emphasis on the active, disjunctive moments or movements of homogenization and diasporization, it can easily be objected that hybridization assumes, as was often the case with the nineteenth-century theorists of race, the prior existence of pure, fixed, and separate antecedents.”⁴⁶

Ethnomusicologists have grappled with similar concerns about hybridity, in this case arising from the valences of mixture and multiplicity that often appear under hybridity’s name in the World Music recording industry and in cultural heritage management around non-Western musical practices. Discussing the concept’s circulation in the administrative strategies of the Western metropolis, Martin Stokes has argued that celebrations of musical hybridity convert the cultural difference of migrants and minorities into an index of the city’s capacity to foster, regulate, and assimilate the sounds of minoritarian cultural encounter. Incorporated into stable multicultural regimes, the diverse musical styles and fluctuating cultural identities that reverberate in crowded, contested urban spaces thus become the soundtrack to quaint “ethnic neighborhoods” that sustain “the marketing of ‘global cities.’”⁴⁷

Subjecting civic celebrations of musical hybridity to critique, Stokes and others have demonstrated how the concept’s subversive theoretical potential can succumb to the economic imperatives, political blindspots, and rhetorical misfires of neoliberal regimes that operate under the sign of the mixed, the multiple, and the multicultural.⁴⁸ This offers a certain critical perspective on the performance of Muslim subjectivities at Andalusian heritage festivals, insofar as it prompts us to consider whether flamenco-Arab fusion’s maverick musical play on Islamic and Andalusian, past and present, self and other was subject to stabilization by an Andalusian civic discourse that appeared more concerned with celebrating the fabled figure of the multicultural Moor than with hearing the political claims of contemporary migrants and religious converts. Yet Andalusian civic discourse was itself unstable, strategically deferring regional identity through invocations of racial, religious, and cultural difference in Andalusia’s own medieval past, so that critiques of hybridity formulated in this way, applied in this case, would blur the supple ethnographic contours and diffuse political consequences that characterized Muslim musical performance in the field.

Critiquing hybridity in a different key, scholars like Catherine Appert have shifted the critical terrain from discourse analysis to ethnographic case studies that appear to exhaust the concept’s *descriptive* potential as well. Referring to one network of hip-hop musicians in Senegal, for example, Appert explains that “international rappers understand hip hop as always already indigenous,” framing it as African diasporic music so that hip-hop codes as “a musical returnee, an encounter with sameness.”⁴⁹ In that case, Appert argues, hybridity “reinscribes the limitations of western-centric models of cultural globalization that don’t necessarily account for how music makers *understand themselves* in relation to a globally interconnected world.”⁵⁰ Appert’s provocative case study, pointing beyond the descriptive

bounds of hybridity, offers an instructive counterpoint to the case of Muslim musical performance in Andalusia.

At first glance, in fact, the language of international hip-hop musicians in Senegal seems to resonate with a narrative that has characterized flamenco-Arab fusion since its inception: discussing the early fusion project *Macama Jonda* ("Deep Encounter," 1983), which served as a reference for many of my field contacts, an anonymous member of the Orchestra of the Tétouan Conservatory explained that "for the first time in five hundred years [i.e. since the Christian Reconquest], we are working to connect what was already connected."⁵¹ This Moroccan musician appeared to describe their musical practice as reinstantiating a sameness that time and politics had disrupted, rather than proposing a hybrid of two musical styles. In the same interview, however, the project's director described *Macama Jonda* as demonstrating "the possibility of encounter between people and between communities, may it last forever and serve as an inspiration to all."⁵²

Through this language of historical connections and cultural encounter, the musicians were articulating a localized and deeply ambivalent conception of Hispano-Arab music, culture, and history that continued to shape flamenco-Arab fusion three decades later. While Appert's field contacts were effectively "doing away with hybridity's requisite difference to emphasize sameness and historicity,"⁵³ it was important to my field contacts that their musical manipulations of sameness and historicity were, in fact, facilitating cultural encounters—"deep" encounters marked by common origins and prior contact. These musicians were indeed bringing two things together, even if producing them in the process: two styles, two cultures, two communities—described by musicians and institutional spokespersons alike as emanating from *las dos orillas* ("the two shores") of the Mediterranean Sea—within the framework of a Moorish legacy that described these cultural formations as *historically, philologically, and genealogically related*. It was in this liminal space between cultural difference and historical sameness that the musicians artfully conflated the origins of flamenco and Moroccan classical music; of migrants, converts, and Moriscos; of Islamic and Andalusian, self and other without however losing the political potency of their identification as Muslims, as migrants, as converts, or as minorities.

Performing Muslim subjectivity as open yet intelligible, always in process and yet always in play, musicians created fissures within Andalusian civic discourse around the Moorish legacy, which in turn opened possibilities for revision, realignment, and resistance such as the performance of Moroccan migration as Moorish repatriation. This also posed the risk that Muslim subjectivities would be incorporated into Andalusian discourses of cultural difference that maintained unequal distributions of social, economic, and political power among stable formations of Muslims and non-Muslims, migrants and citizens, leaving the musicians vulnerable to exclusion, surveillance, and disenfranchisement offstage. Or perhaps, tracing the ethnographic contours more closely, the risk was that musicians would sustain a discourse of Andalusian regional identity that thrived on the maverick interweavings of Islamic and Andalusian, past and present, self and other which their hybrid musical performances enacted. In fact, this volatile field of diffuse and multifarious outcomes is precisely what an agile, situational application of hybridity should allow us to name and to interrogate. Ultimately, I propose applying the framework of hybridity to Muslim musical performance in Andalusia because it performs useful descriptive and theoretical work, approximating the condition of intimate, ambivalent entanglement with Andalusian regional identity that my Muslim field contacts continually held open by

invoking the Moorish legacy. In the following section, I suggest that the study of music and Islam in Andalusia requires further exploration of hybridity's temporal aspects as well.

Hauntology in Moorish Musical Performance

It will be clear by now that *Lights of Ancient Light* and the Muslim subjectivities that it generated were performative of a time other than the present; other, for that matter, than the past. They emerged in the fabled, festivalized time of the Moorish legacy: neither past nor present, haunted by figures of medieval Berber chieftains, multicultural Moors, and persecuted Moriscos. The absence of these figures from contemporary Granada suffused the performance as a lavish, living presence—producing subjectivities, indexing anxieties, embodying claims to viable space, and realigning identities across social, historical, and geopolitical borders.

With this distinctive Moorish temporality in mind, I argue that scenes of Moorishness invite us to reconsider the disjunctive moment that Bhabha identified as interrupting the ostensibly seamless flow of Western modernity over time, and in the process, opening additional possibilities for resistance—or reinscription.⁵⁴ If the opening of fissures within Andalusian civic discourse involves the resurgence of figures from a troubled, unresolved Moorish past, and if these figures from the past shape expressions and experiences of Muslim subjectivity in the present—with urgent ethical implications for economic migrants and religious converts—then the study of music and Islam in Andalusia constitutes a compelling case for joining hauntology and hybridity around ethnographic fieldwork through a localized, situational reading of the postcolonial caesura.

In the process, I offer an alternative perspective on hauntology in Hispanic Studies and Spanish Cultural Studies, where scholars have long recognized that we cannot effectively describe Muslim subjectivities in Andalusia particularly, or in Spain generally, within traditional ontological frameworks of past and present, presence and absence, being and non-being. While these previous studies of Islam in Spain have invoked hauntology, I suggest that sustained considerations of embodiment and performativity allow us to weave hauntological thinking more deeply into the fabric of hybridity—ultimately, with the aim of more fully engaging the interpretive and political potential of both concepts.⁵⁵

In research on Moroccan migration in Spain, Daniela Flesler has applied hauntology to interrogate the Moorish legacy's dubious social and political consequences.⁵⁶ Writing from a largely psychoanalytic perspective, Flesler diagnoses a complex of socio-psychological anxieties among Spaniards—indexed by recurring discursive slippages between “Moor” and “Moroccan” in a variety of “fictional and social texts”—arguing that they fuel the distinctive, historically-inflected forms of racism that characterize Spanish responses to Moroccan migrants. Flesler argues that such anxious iterations of the Moorish legacy should be interpreted as ghostly, insofar as they populate contemporary Hispano-Moroccan social experience with figures of a troubled, unresolved Moorish past:

As in the case of Marx's ghosts analyzed by Derrida, in which no disavowal has been able to make them completely disappear, Spaniards' difficulties with Moroccan immigrants, and their perception of them as 'Moors,' becomes a symptom of the ghostly slippage between the present and past they produce, and the unsolved historical trauma they awake.⁵⁷

It is also within this hauntological framework, however, that Flesler offers a more hopeful reading of the situation, proposing that encounters between Spaniards and Moroccan migrants, filtered through the Moorish legacy and recurring over time, will function like the Freudian dream that recurs with a purpose:

Contemporary Spanish responses to Moroccan immigration can be read . . . as elements in a transitional working through process, where we can see symptomatic traces not only of an unresolved trauma but also of a nation's effort at trying to come to terms with its ghosts; attempting, not always successfully, to differentiate past and present, to get past its past in order to inhabit its present.⁵⁸

I suggest several ways in which Muslim musical performance in Andalusia, as exemplified by *Lights of Ancient Light*, might provide fresh perspectives on Flesler's important contributions. While she recognizes, for example, the diverse histories of migration and the complex negotiations of Spanish nationalism that occur at the level of regional autonomy, the thrust of Flesler's arguments ultimately subsumes regional differences under the rubric of Spaniards, the Spanish nation, and a Spanish historical consciousness that anxiously disavows Moroccan migrants in order to quell an Islamophobic "fear of invasion." This is, Flesler argues, an impulse "to protect a presumably uncontaminated identity from immigrants," which regions as diverse as Catalonia, Galicia, Valencia, and the Basque Country have inherited from a conservative, militantly Catholic tradition of Spanish historiography.⁵⁹ Andalusian regional discourse on the Moorish legacy, in contrast, appeared very often to interpellate migrants, Muslims, and other minorities as indices of an Islamic past that coded not as an historical trauma to be contained or dispelled, but rather as an invaluable source of cultural capital to be celebrated, assimilated, and exploited.

In addition, while Flesler interprets the Moorish legacy as constituting a disruption of the "dominant national fiction" that shapes majoritarian discourse among non-Muslim Spaniards—a fiction of "pure and uncontaminated 'Spanish' origin"⁶⁰—*Lights of Ancient Light* confirms that Andalusian responses to Islam and migration were complicated by intimate, intersubjective negotiations of the Moorish legacy among economic migrants, religious converts, and non-Muslim Andalusians as they invoked Andalusia's Islamic heritage in tandem. Rather than proposing to examine how the Spanish nation works through historical anxieties vis-à-vis Moroccan migrants, we might wonder how individuals, communities, and institutions, performing an agglomeration of racial, ethnic, and religious identities at the intersections of Spanish national and autonomous regional discourse, tend to mutually interpellate one another through entangled citations of the Moorish legacy.

In doing so, we would find ourselves once again considering the concept of hybridity, which Flesler also invokes. Describing the Festival of Moors and Christians in Alcoy, one of many annual reenactments of the Christian Reconquest in Spain, Flesler interprets rhetorical and performative excesses in the festival's activities as "attempts to reinforce a division between Moors and Christians into mutually exclusive categories." Of course, these anxious attempts to delineate self and other inevitably fail, in which case "the overwhelming presence of this excess becomes an index of an underlying doubt."⁶¹ For Flesler, hybridity names a discursive and socio-psychological mechanism that reveals a structural ambivalence: "Moorish and Christian identities coexist . . . in that 'third space' theorized by Bhabha, an 'in-betweenness' which consists of neither the simple separation of the two groups as strangers and opposites, nor of their homogenization."⁶² Capturing the distinctive, historicizing ambivalence that characterizes a wide range of public Spanish

responses to Moroccan migration, this conception of hybridity nevertheless cancels out the noise, as it were, that musical examples like *Lights of Ancient Light* might help us to recover.

If flamenco-Arab fusion inspires us to consider the Moorish legacy as generating scenes of interaction and interpellation; and if it compels us to consider the Moorish legacy's social and political consequences as refracted through simultaneous, entangled articulations of this medieval Islamic heritage among Andalusian civic institutions, economic migrants, and religious converts, then we should seek to interrogate not only those slippages and excesses that reveal an ambivalent discursive field in which Muslim subjectivities are invoked and dispelled, but also those hybrid, haunted temporalities that generate ambivalent performative moments in which Muslim subjectivities might be revised, realigned, or reinscribed.

In the conclusion to *The Location of Culture*, dwelling on temporal aspects of hybridity, Bhabha deconstructs the ideal of seamless, progressive self-reinvention over time which constitutes an "essential gesture of Western modernity," locating within it a mutual and indefinite deferral of subjectivity between self and other.⁶³ It is in this alternative, belated temporality that Bhabha locates hybridity's potential for resistance, as it "opens up an interruptive time-lag in the 'progressive' myth of modernity, and enables the diasporic and the postcolonial to be represented."⁶⁴ I suggest provisionally that in scenes of Moorishness, Andalusian civic discourse invoked the Moorish legacy within the framework of modern Western temporality—tactically inflected with historicizing citations of the Moorish legacy. This was, in effect, an attempt to weave the region's medieval Islamic past seamlessly and progressively into the economic imperatives, institutional agendas, and diplomatic platforms of its neoliberal present, all of which required Andalusian regionalism to code as interreligious yet intelligible, pluralistic yet self-same. In the process, this celebratory Moorish multiculturalism folded the Muslim present inhabited by economic migrants and religious converts into Andalusian historical consciousness, divesting Muslims of their contemporaneity and reinscribing their political claims. As for non-Muslim Andalusians and Andalusian civic institutions, it is also worth considering that scenes of Moorishness obscured ethical considerations of the other with historical introspections on the self.

Muslim musical performances, however, invoked the Moorish legacy as well, effectively repeating these narratives of a pluralistic Andalusian modernity at a distance and redistributing their meaning among the musicians, in the process creating a *caesura* within the time of Andalusian regional identity. In this way, musicians entered into a haunted, hybrid space in which the boundaries between past and present, Islamic and Andalusian, self and other were breached, allowing for realignments of people and practices across Andalusian time and space. Performing embodied connections to the Moriscos, in particular, whose presence in Andalusian territory was interrupted by forced conversion and mass expulsion, economic migrants and religious converts invested the social, spiritual, and aesthetic practices of their communities with the authenticating allure of the Moorish legacy—or that curious corner of the Moorish legacy in which the Moriscos indexed Muslim difference as structured precisely by their absence, an absence that rendered Islam covertly present within their erstwhile spaces of work, play, and prayer. Still, the *caesura* was incomplete. Or rather, the curious quasi-*caesura* of the Moorish legacy sustained Andalusian civic discourse precisely by interrupting it.

Conclusion

Hispanists tend to agree that the Moorish legacy exerts significant influence on expressions and experiences of Islam in Southern Spain; scholars in Mediterranean Studies, and Middle East & North African Studies also seem to agree that the Moorish legacy exerts influence on expressions and experiences of Islam in the Mediterranean more broadly. In the case of Andalusia, this followed not only from the frequent articulation of the Moorish legacy's narrative contents in festivalized contexts like the Millennial, but also from the multifarious ways in which this historical narrative permeated everyday time, space, and experience—a phenomenon that Barbara Fuchs has interpreted, in the context of Golden Age literature and Early Modern formations of Spanish national identity, as constituting a "Moorish habitus."⁶⁵

Musical performances of Moorishness in contemporary urban Andalusia, as exemplified by *Lights of Ancient Light*, revealed Muslim subjectivities to be hybrid, haunted, and indeed phenomenally citational of a Moorish habitus that preceded and outran the musicians themselves. This habitus was a quotidian prehistory of Moorish experience which, in this case, sustained the distinctive social, cultural, and diplomatic discourses of Andalusian regional autonomy, and within which economic migrants and religious converts continually opened fissures through the heightened facticity of bodies in motion and voices raised in song. Muslim subjectivities therefore emerged not only in moments, but in *scenes* of Moorishness. These living, breathing scenes gathered the sights and sounds emanating from musicians' bodies into a dynamic intersubjective relationship with those of embodied participants, who themselves gathered previous encounters with the Moorish legacy into assemblages of looking, listening, clapping, dancing bodies to populate the "thither" side of performativity, as Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick have it in their discussion of the topic.⁶⁶

Parker and Sedgwick propose that analysis of the speech act, especially in the wake of work by Derrida and Judith Butler, requires a serious exploration of the "populous and contested scene in which the role of silent or implied witnesses . . . or the quality and structuration of the bonds that unite auditors or link them to speakers, bears as much weight as do the particular speech acts of supposed individual speech agents."⁶⁷ Applying this analytical imperative to Muslim musical performance in Andalusia, we might also consider that the Andalusian regional government has inscribed the Moorish legacy into architectural monuments, historical neighborhoods, horticultural practices, and the like, often with the sanction of international bodies such as UNESCO. Thus one could argue that the bonds uniting musicians, festivalgoers, and festival organizers were robustly and effusively physical. In addition to distributing their iterability through embodied performers and witnesses, I suggest that musical performances of Moorishness accrued their iterability from the built structures and physical environments within which they occurred.

Far from complete, I hope that this theoretical outline will nevertheless inspire further conversation around the Moorish legacy and its phenomenal impact on race, religion, heritage, and mobility both within and beyond Andalusia. Ultimately, the musical performances of Muslim subjectivity that I witnessed—intersectional, intersubjective, and deeply ambivalent—were orbiting around the Moorish legacy as moons around a planet, exerting and receiving diffuse but undeniable influence. The musicians, festivalgoers, and festival organizers participating in these maverick scenes of Moorishness were trafficking in time, difference, and desire, performing the Moorish past as they positioned themselves

and those around them in the present. All the while, they were marking unknown lines of flight into the future.

Notes

1. Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, "Al-Andalus in Andalusia: Negotiating Moorish History and Regional Identity in Southern Spain," *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2007): 863–886. [↗](#)
2. Eric Calderwood, "The Invention of *al-Andalus*: Discovering the Past and Creating the Present in Granada's Islamic Tourism Sites," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 1 (2014): 27–55. [↗](#)
3. For a representative edited volume on this topic, see David Coleman and Simon Doubleday, eds, *In the Light of Medieval Spain: Islam, the West, and the Relevance of the Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). [↗](#)
4. Elena Arigita, "The 'Cordoba Paradigm': Memory and Silence around Europe's Islamic Past," in *Islam and the Politics of Culture in Europe: Memory, Aesthetics, Art*, edited by Elena Arigita, Sarah Dornhof, and Frank Peter (Bielefeld, DE: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 21–40. [↗](#)
5. As applied to themes of migration, see Daniela Flesler, "Contemporary Moroccan Immigration and Its Ghosts," in *In the Light of Medieval Spain*, 107–124. As applied to traces of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship in Spanish cultural production, see Jo Labanyi, "Engaging with Ghosts; or, Theorizing Culture in Contemporary Spain," Introduction to *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain: Theoretical Debates and Cultural Practice*, edited by Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1–14. Cf. Erin Graff Zivin "Introduction" in *The Marrano Specter: Derrida and Hispanism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 1–12. for theoretical reflections on Derrida's influence in Iberian Studies and Latin American Studies more broadly. [↗](#)
6. See Liliana Suárez-Navaz for discussion of Granada Acoge's social services work with Senegalese and Moroccan migrants in the 1990s. Liliana Suárez-Navaz, *Rebordering the Mediterranean: Boundaries and Citizenship in Southern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 162–190. For a broader discussion of NGOs and their impact on migrant politics in Granada, see Gunther Dietz, "Frontier Hybridisation or Culture Clash? Transnational Migrant Communities and Sub-National Identity Politics in Andalusia, Spain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 6 (2004): 1087–1112. [↗](#)
7. Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE), *Estudio demográfico de la población musulmana* ("Demographic Study of the Muslim Population"), see editions from 2013 to 2018 via www.ucide.org, last accessed June 1, 2019; and Ana Planet Contreras, "Spain," in *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, edited by Jocelyne Cesari (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 311–349. [↗](#)
8. For a study of local debates around the Grand Mosque's construction, see David Coleman, "The Persistence of the Past in the Albaicín: Granada's New Mosque and the Question of Historical Relevance," in *In the Light of Medieval Spain*, 157–188. For maps and statistics on Muslim places of worship in Andalusia, see reports by the Spanish Ministry of Justice's Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain, www.observatorioreligion.es, last accessed June 1, 2019; cf. Planet Contreras, "Spain," 322–331, which also provides estimates of Muslim religious observance. [↗](#)
9. Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, "Managing Muslim Visibility: Conversion, Immigration, and Spanish Imaginaries of Islam," *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 4 (2012): 611–623; and idem, *Spain Unmoored*, Ch. 4: "A Reluctant *Convivencia*: Minority Representation and Unequal Multiculturalism," Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, *Spain Unmoored: Migration, Conversion, and the Politics of Islam* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 158–188. Converts certainly experienced discrimination in Andalusia, however Rogozen-Soltar is pointing to a structural difference in their ability to revise and appropriate Andalusian discourses on Islam in ways that economic migrants could not. [↗](#)
10. Conversation with Ahmed, Granada, May 20, 2014. [↗](#)
11. Conversation with Munir, Granada, May 14, 2014. [↗](#)

12. Rogozen-Soltar, *Spain Unmoored*, 13–16. [↗](#)
13. Ibid, 11. [↗](#)
14. Ian Goldstein has examined these interactions from the perspective of music cognition, joining ethnographic detail with sustained analysis of style, genre, technique, and creativity to reveal the complex effects of the Moorish legacy—as understood by individual musicians and within ensembles—on the social and cognitive dynamics of collaboration between Moroccan and Andalusian musicians. See Ian Goldstein, “Experiencing Musical Connection: Sonic Interventions in Mediterranean Social Memory,” (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2017). [↗](#)
15. Translations mine unless noted otherwise. Zawi ibn Ziri founded Granada following the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate, which by the early eleventh century had disintegrated into a number of *ṭawāʾif*, or Islamic party states. See, *inter alia*, Joseph O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975). [↗](#)
16. Conversation with Inmaculada Cortés Martínez, Parque de las Ciencias, Granada, May 30, 2014. [↗](#)
17. Ibid. [↗](#)
18. For a critique of the Moorish Legacy Foundation’s heritage programming, see Eric Calderwood, “The Invention of al-Andalus: Discovering the Past and Creating the Present in Granada’s Tourism Sites,” *Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 1 (2014): 27–55. [↗](#)
19. Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund King (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954). Cf. María Rosa Menocal’s influential *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002). Judeo-Spanish identities hold a bizarre position in this tripartite formulation of “the three cultures,” constituting a presence perhaps more absent than any so far discussed. For studies of Jewish representations in and of the *convivencia* concept, see Daniela Flesler and Adrián Pérez Melgosa, “Hervás, *Convivencia*, and the Heritagization of Spain’s Jewish Past,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 10, no. 2 (2010): 53–76; and Jonathan Ray, “Reassessing Our Approach to *Convivencia*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 2 (2005): 1–18. On the place of Sephardic musical repertoires in this discourse, see Judith Cohen, “Constructing a Spanish Jewish Festival: Music and the Appropriation of Tradition,” *The World of Music* 41, no. 3 (1999): 85–113; and Ruth Davis, ed., *Musical Exodus: Al-Andalus and Its Jewish Diasporas* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). [↗](#)
20. For a representative article, see Ignacio Cembrero, “El Ministerio del Interior reintroduce las cuchillas en la verja de Melilla,” *El País*, October 31, 2013. [↗](#)
21. Cf. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, “Actitudes hacia la inmigración,” nos. 2918 (October 2012)–2967 (March 2014), www.cis.es, last accessed August 2019. [↗](#)
22. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008). [↗](#)
23. Brian Karl has identified a certain pragmatic cosmopolitanism among Moroccan musicians in Granada, arguing that many adapted their musical sensibilities and self-presentations to the demands of an “undiscriminating” Spanish public, which for its part deployed a selective cosmopolitanism to keep Moroccan migrants at a distance while maintaining its own cultural and economic privilege. Ultimately, Karl views these stylistic adaptations as representing a *failed* cosmopolitanism, one that produced momentary flashes of superficial and unequal interaction, ultimately leaving Moroccan musicians stranded on the minoritarian side of a divide. By invoking hybridity, I hope to interrogate the divide itself, as a liminal space within which economic migrants, religious converts, and non-Muslim Andalusians mutually interpellated each other under the rubric of the Moorish past, generating complex and multifarious possibilities—including possibilities for revision, realignment, and resistance among Muslim musicians. Brian Karl, “Across a Divide: Cosmopolitanism, Genre, and Crossover among Immigrant Moroccan Musicians in Contemporary Andalusia,” *Migration Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 111–130. [↗](#)
24. “It is this palpable pressure of division and displacement that pushes Fanon’s writing to the edge of things—the cutting edge that reveals no ultimate radiance but, in his words, ‘exposed an

utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born.” Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 58. [↗](#)

25. Ibid, 3. [↗](#)
26. A project in which hybridity serves as “a critical discourse committed to the practice of empowering minorities.” Homi Bhabha, Foreword to *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, eds Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed Books, 2015). [↗](#)
27. David Coleman, *Creating Christian Granada: Society and Religious Culture in an Old-World Frontier City, 1492–1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). [↗](#)
28. Mercedes García-Arenal, “The Moriscos in Morocco: from Granadan Emigration to the Hornacheros of Salé,” in *The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain: a Mediterranean Diaspora*, eds Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2014), 286–328. [↗](#)
29. In Arabic, these repertoires are known by the revealing epithet *al-mūsīqa al-andalusīyya*: “Andalusian music.” See Carl Davila, *The Andalusian Music of Morocco: al-Āla: History, Society and Text* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013); Jonathan Glasser, *The Lost Paradise: Andalusī Music in Urban North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); and Jonathan Shannon, *Performing al-Andalus: Music and Nostalgia across the Mediterranean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). [↗](#)
30. Conversation with Usama, Granada, April 26, 2014. [↗](#)
31. Concert at the Grand Mosque of Granada, May 24, 2014. [↗](#)
32. Conversation with Moussa, phone, May 20, 2018. [↗](#)
33. Brian Oberlander, “Deep Encounters: the Practice and Politics of Flamenco-Arab Fusion in Andalusia,” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2017). For provocative studies of blackness in flamenco aesthetics, see K. Meira Goldberg, “Sonidos Negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco,” *Dance Chronicle* 37, no. 1 (2014): 85–113; and Kathy Milazzo, “Black Erased: the Tango de Negros in Spain’s Romantic Age,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Ethnicity*, edited by Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). [↗](#)
34. Conversation with María, Granada, November 12, 2013. [↗](#)
35. Daniela Flesler, *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008). [↗](#)
36. Susan Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 88–119. [↗](#)
37. Eric Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Modern Moroccan Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Susan Martin-Márquez, *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). [↗](#)
38. Oberlander, *Deep Encounters*, Ch. 2: “Southern Sensibility,” 68–119. Also, Eric Calderwood, “In Andalusía, There Are No Foreigners’: Andalusismo from Transperipheral Critique to Colonial Apology,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15, no. 4 (2015): 399–417. [↗](#)
39. Ibid. [↗](#)
40. Ibid. [↗](#)
41. Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus*. Cf. Davila, *The Andalusian Music of Morocco*; Glasser, *The Lost Paradise*; and Shannon, *Performing al-Andalus*. [↗](#)
42. Oberlander, *Deep Encounters*. [↗](#)
43. Marina Martín Jiménez, “La música une a los pueblos,” *Andalusía y Marruecos: Las industrias cultural* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 5. [↗](#)

44. Ibid. [↗](#)
45. Tariq Modood and Prina Werbner, eds, *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London: Zed Books, 1997). [↗](#)
46. Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23. [↗](#)
47. Martin Stokes, "Creativity, Globalization and Music," *Volume! The French Journal of Popular Music Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 30–45. Cf. Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 140–160. [↗](#)
48. A possibility that Bhabha recognized in the Foreword to Modood and Werbner, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. [↗](#)
49. Catherine Appert, "On Hybridity in African Popular Music: the Case of Senegalese Hip Hop," *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 2 (2016): 279–299. [↗](#)
50. Ibid, 280. Italics mine. [↗](#)
51. Rosana Torres, "El encuentro de músicas y pueblos, escenificado en 'Macama Jonda,'" *El País*, April 18, 1983. [↗](#)
52. Ibid. [↗](#)
53. Appert, "On Hybridity in African Popular Music," 284. [↗](#)
54. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, "Conclusion: 'Race,' time and the revision of modernity," 338–367. [↗](#)
55. For Derrida's formulation of hauntology, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Also, frequently cited in Hispanic Studies, see Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). [↗](#)
56. Daniela Flesler, *The Return of the Moor* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008). [↗](#)
57. Ibid, 55–56. [↗](#)
58. Ibid., 96. [↗](#)
59. Ibid., 48. [↗](#)
60. Ibid., 58. [↗](#)
61. Ibid., 102. [↗](#)
62. Ibid., 129. [↗](#)
63. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 344. [↗](#)
64. Ibid. [↗](#)
65. Barbara Fuchs, *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). [↗](#)
66. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Introduction to *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995). [↗](#)
67. Ibid., 7. [↗](#)

Author Information

Brian Oberlander

Brian Oberlander is an ethnomusicologist who studies musical expressions and experiences of Islam in the Mediterranean, especially those invoking the region's Moorish past in order to voice alternative political claims in the present. He has conducted fieldwork in Spain, France, and Morocco and has presented research at meetings of the Cultural Studies Association, the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the International Council for Traditional Music. He is co-editor of the volume *A Sea of Voices: Music and Encounter at the Mediterranean Crossroads*, forthcoming from Routledge.

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Political Power and the Industrial Development of Cultural Artifacts in China

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ABSTRACT With national policy support on industries that produce cultural goods and artifacts, Chinese industries have developed quickly in recent decades. Some cities and their industries are led by the central government, while others are led by the local government. In this paper, the author uses ceramic industry clusters in Jingdezhen city (central-led) and Longquan city (local-led) as a comparative study to illustrate the political power relations of government-led cultural artifact industry development in China. In sum, the excessive emphasis on political hierarchy and centralized control of production management will weaken the cultural essence of the local cultural artifacts. The localized government-led development strategy is positive to preserve the cultural essence and design a befitting local industry development strategy in Chinese cities.

KEYWORDS art, China, cultural heritage, local government, political economy, regional government

Introduction

Culture-related industries have been considered as relevant economic procurators for measuring cities' creativity.¹ The Asia-Pacific has the largest market share in culture-related industries worldwide, generating USD 743 billion of revenue (33% of global CCI revenue) and 12.7 million jobs (43% of global CCI jobs) in 2013.²

The emphasis on cultural related industries from the Chinese government has also accelerated the rise of China as an economic and cultural power in the global market.

The first Chinese official document on *Cultural and Its Related Industries Categories* was published by the central government in 2004, which initiated the related industries' development from a national level. Three layers of cultural activities have been defined in the Chinese context, which are summarized in Figure 1: 1) Core layer, 2) Peripheral layer, and 3) Culture related layer.³

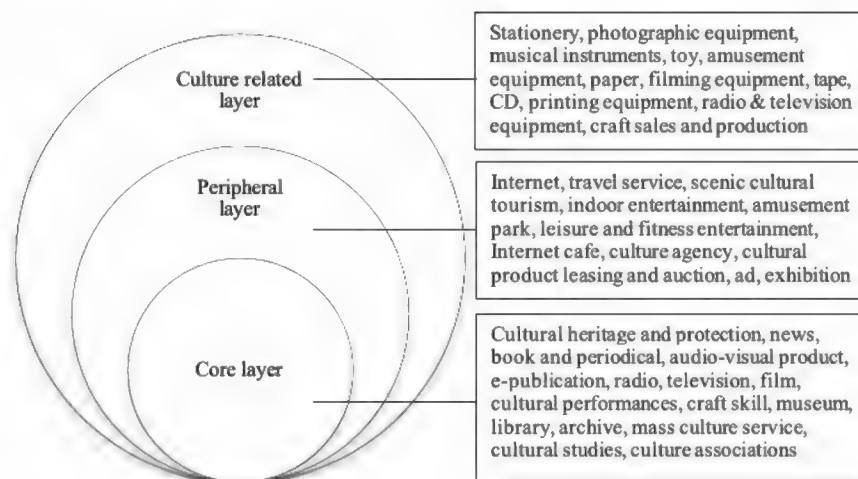


Figure 1: Three categories of Chinese culture-related industries: core, peripheral, and cultural-related layers. Source: summarized by the author from the classification of Xiong and Fu, 2012.

The ceramics industry is a representative sub-sector of Chinese culture and its related industries, since it not only belongs to the core layer of the industries' category, but also has witnessed a history of development that reflects changing national strategies.

The Chinese ceramic industry had a glorious history before the 18th century, dominating the global export share of ceramic products with its significant producing skills and high value of art.⁴ After the continuous wars in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Chinese ceramic industry was plagued by a sharp decline in production and export. Jingdezhen, known as the "Porcelain Capital," shut down hundreds of ceramic factories, and thousands of workers lost their jobs. Yixing, the "Pottery Capital," had only approximately 20 people working in ceramic production in 1949.⁵ Similar situations happened in other ceramic producing clusters in China, including Longquan in Zhejiang province, Dehua in Fujian province, and Liling in Hunan province. At the same time, Chinese ceramic products had a large declining share in the global market. Advanced industrial technology made European ceramic production gradually free from the handicraft industry after the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. Japan's porcelain production also emerged, which competed with ceramic products in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and other European countries. The diversification of ceramic development worldwide has accelerated the ceramic industry development.

After the establishment of the socialist new China, the Chinese ceramic industry went through a long process of restoration and improvement under the lead of the government. The government was centralized and highly integrated the politics, economy, and culture in mandatory ways from the 1950s to the late 1970s.⁶ At the beginning, the Chinese national capitalist economy was very limited in scale. Modern capitalist production could not be truly established, and socialized large-scale production could not be implemented. In the early 1950s there were 5,641 ceramic production enterprises in national level, of which only 172 were small-scale modern factories, accounting for 3% of the total; the remaining 5,469 enterprises—97%—were small workshops.⁷ After the initial industrialization of Chinese industries at the national level, the ceramic industry also applied the industrialized mode to its production process. The first batch of ceramic products was based on "Jianguo Porcelain" in Jingdezhen, designed by the Institute of Metallurgical Ceramics and Shanghai Institute of Industrial Engineering in 1953.⁸ These ceramic products were only allowed to be used in celebrations and on significant occasions. The design style, producing process, capital chain, and output volume are under the control of central government management.

Ceramic related state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were built in key industrial cities to carry out directions from the central government. The investment in those SOEs was entirely from the central government, and all outputs and profits belonged to the central government as well. Since there are strict and detailed requirements for industrial management and products, very few people in these enterprises cared whether the commodities they produced could be sold and allocated well in the market. Also, creative and new products have been created in a limited way because of these strictures. This relationship is visualized in Figure 2. SOEs serve the state as production machines, to maximize industrialization's profits and development in the command economy period. State officers give instructions for exactly what to produce, how much to produce, and at what price to acquire inputs, with the bureaucratic allocations from the central government to local governments.⁹ As for the role of state banks, they allocated investment input into state-owned enterprises, and made the output standards, the production levels and the prices of ceramic products set bureaucratically during the process.

Figure 2: State-owned enterprises' management framework. Source: summarized by the author from Steinfeld, 1999.

For those cities not on the list of national key industrial cities, the local government has comparatively larger autonomous power in deciding local industries' development strategy. This results in a diverging development path in Chinese cities that are led by the central government, compared to those led by the local government. In this paper, I discuss the differential influence of political power on the development of cultural artifact industries in the Chinese context, taking two ceramic industrial clusters as examples.

Methodology and Datasets

There are huge differences among provinces and cities in eastern, central, and western parts of China, since different regions have varied economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. Figure 3 shows the provincial level of the performance of cultural and its related industries based on the existing Chinese evaluation system. This evaluation system considers 3 first-grade factors (i.e. industry productivity, industry influence, and industry driving force) and 8 second-grade factors from all provinces and municipalities in China. All factors are equally-weighted. Figure 3 shows the results calculated based on these factors in 2014. Those provinces/cities have performance outcome higher than 50 indicates the region has a high performance in China. Medium performance is between 30-50, and low performance has the result lower than 30. Eastern China has a comparatively better performance than other areas. To minimize the influence from geographical factors, I chose two representative ceramic industrial clusters in the eastern part of China: Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, and Longquan in Zhejiang. Both of these cities have a long history in ceramic products creation and production.

Figure 3: The culture-related industries' performance map of Chinese provinces and cities in 2014. Source: created by the author from the reports of Renmin University of China Cultural and its Related Industries Institute.¹⁰ Hong Kong (HK), Macau (MC) and Taiwan (TW) are not included.

Both quantitative and qualitative data are used in this study. Four datasets were collected. The first dataset is the spatial planning of the ceramic industrial parks in Jingdezhen in 1999, 2003, and 2016. This dataset shows the trend of the spatial distribution of ceramic industrial parks in Jingdezhen, which are owned by the state. Longquan only had one ceramic industrial park in 2003, which was built by the local government. This dataset also includes the registered ceramic firms in the ceramic industrial parks in the two cities. The data source is from the Bureau of Ceramic Industry Development in both cities, which is a unique department in the local government for the specialized ceramic preservation and development services and administrative procedures. The second dataset is the statistical reports from the national and provincial Bureau of Statistics, which is applied for the ceramic industry at the local level. The third dataset is socioeconomic information, especially with the Masters¹¹ information at the provincial level, including their gender, age, specializations, ceramic-related patents for skills or products, and related development policies and strategies. The final dataset was compiled from the official reports and documents from the State Council and China Light Industry Council published in 2003 and in 2010, interviews, field observations, and Chinese microblogging and social media platforms. Semi-structured interviews and site observations, which were based on but not limited by a prepared outline, were conducted from March to October 2018. The interviewees included provincial and local government officials; urban planners, developers, and consultants; university scholars; artists; managers; and consumers. The information from the interviews was used for qualitative analysis. The final sample included 37 face-to-face interviews lasting from 20 minutes to 2 hours. These interviews were conducted in the Chinese language and later transcribed and translated by the author. Site observations were conducted on the basis of interviews. Site observations helped the author in understanding the production of ceramics, innovation in style design, and glazing skills.¹²

Jingdezhen: Central-led Development

Jingdezhen is located in the northeastern part of Jiangxi Province, bordering Anhui Province to the north (Figure 4). According to the 2018 Jingdezhen Statistics Report on socioeconomic development, the population of this prefecture-level city is 1.66 million people.

Figure 4. Location of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province.

For centuries, the ceramic industry has been the pillar industry of Jingdezhen. Jingdezhen's porcelain products became prosperous in the Ming¹³ dynasty. Since then, the city enjoyed a high reputation as the "Capital of Porcelain." Jingdezhen has been considered an economic and trade center since ancient times. After the suspension of production there due to wars in the early 20th century, Jingdezhen was recognized as one of China's "key industrial cities" in 1949, and it became directly controlled by the central government.¹⁴ Since 1950, the Jingdezhen ceramic industry entered the development stage in the planned economy period.¹⁵ Under the lead of the central government, the Jingdezhen local government began the socialist transformation of a porcelain factory designed as Ming and Qing¹⁶ imperial kiln factories. This transformation included three aspects.

First, a process designed to produce high-tier, boutique ceramic products for nobilities was transformed into large-scale manufacturing factory system, intended to achieve the maximum production and industry development under the strategy of planned economy. During that time, the role of the ceramic industry in Jingdezhen transformed into providing the household ceramic products for Chinese citizens as required by the planners from central government. From 1950 to 1962, with the lead from central government, the Jingdezhen municipal government successively established a number of enterprises producing daily-use porcelain and painted porcelain according to the plan of porcelain industry manufacturing and development, to satisfy the requirements from the central government. Those ceramic factories were called the "Ten Porcelain Enterprises,"¹⁷ which were the most famous and influential ceramic state-owned enterprises in Chinese ceramic history.

Second, the distribution of ceramic artists and workers changed from a dispersed and irregular form to a lumped and homogeneous form. Before the large-scale existence of SOEs, ceramic enterprises were individual artist studios or family business, which were dispersed throughout Jingdezhen urban areas. During the most prosperous period for the "Ten Porcelain Enterprises," they employed around 40,000 total employees while at the same time Jingdezhen only had a total population of 84,000.¹⁸ If we exclude the children and the elderly, this number means almost 98% of the total population in Jingdezhen worked for state-owned ceramic enterprises.¹⁹

Third, the investment in those SOEs were all from the central government, while all outputs and profits belonged to central government as well. In the beginning of the 1980s, SOEs accounted for over 75% of China's total industry output value. In the city of Jingdezhen, this number was higher than 95% since the main city industry was ceramics and ceramics all belonged to the state.²⁰ According to a government officer in charge of the ceramic

industry planning and development in Jingdezhen, Jingdezhen's ceramic industry was the main support of the Jiangxi province economic output:

Before the 1990s, the total output of the ceramic SOEs was RMB 400 million each year [around USD 83.6 million based on the 1990 currency]. At that time, the total population of Jingdezhen city only took 3% of the total population of Jiangxi province, but the tax revenue of which accounted for more than 20% in Jiangxi province, which made Jingdezhen one of the most industrial base city in Jiangxi province.²¹

Thus, Jingdezhen is a representative case of the production of Chinese artifacts under the dominant central government. The bright side of the central-led development pattern is that it largely increases production volume and standardizes ceramic enterprises and working processes. However, the decreasing number of creative design patents indicates a more conservative development of the industry at the Jingdezhen local level.²² The SOEs served the state as production machines, maximizing industrialization profits and development in the period of the command economy. State planners give instructions of exactly what to produce, how much to produce, and at what price inputs were acquired, using the bureaucratic allocations from the central to the local government.²³

Longquan: Local-led Development

Longquan is one of the most significant ceramic clusters in China, with a high reputation for its celadon products. In the history of Longquan ceramic industry development, the local government plays a crucial rule in restoration, coordination with the business market, public administration, and support for talented people support at the local level.

Longquan is located in the southwestern part of Zhejiang Province, bordering Fujian Province to the southwest (Figure 5). According to the 2017 National Census Report on Zhejiang Province, this county-level city has 290,000 people.

Figure 5. Location of Longquan in Zhejiang Province.

Ancient Longquan celadon has gone through six development periods: 1) the emerging period, from the Three Kingdoms age (220-280) to the Tang dynasty (618-907); 2) the growing period, from the end of the Tang dynasty to the beginning of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127); 3) the middle period, from the late Northern Song dynasty to the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279); 4) the peak period, from the

Southern Song dynasty to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368); 5) the prosperous period, from the Yuan dynasty to the middle of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644); and 6) the decline period, from the late Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty (1636-1912). By the time socialist new China was established in 1949, the Longquan celadon production skills and glazing techniques were almost extinct.²⁴

Longquan celadon industry began to recover after the 1950s. The local government broadcasted for those with celadon-producing skills and glazing techniques to come the city, and offered favorable financial and spatial support. According to an interview with an elderly celadon artist in Longquan, local government officials went door to door visiting Longquan citizens seeking those who had celadon producing and glazing skills, and those who wanted to make efforts to recover the Longquan celadon industry.²⁵ The *Longquan Celadon Restoration Working Group* was set up under the leadership of Guozhen Li, one of the celadon artists in Longquan, and the local government in 1959.²⁶ In looking for the mechanics of producing Longquan celadon, working group experts and technicians, and descendants of Longquan celadon craftsmen used modern science and technology to test the chemical composition of ancient porcelain tiles, and also adopted scientific formulas and advanced techniques to build new large-volume rotary kilns for modern ceramics.

At the same time, the local government retained the original distribution form of celadon artists' studios in Longquan. Instead of centralizing all ceramic enterprises in a designated, government-controlled area, artists were encouraged to find their own spots to set up working studios. Since the skills and knowledge to make many artifacts are handed down from generation to generation—along the lines of families or apprenticeships—decentralized distribution of artist studios gives artists more freedom to create their own ceramic products' design styles. The local government also published several regulations and official documents to support the ceramic industry. For instance, the *Plans of Longquan Celadon Industry Talents Cultivation* offered reward and tax reduction policies to encourage advanced, talented celadon workers, as well as younger generations to join the industry. *Da Kiln and Longquan Kiln Preservation Planning* established preservation measures for existing ancient kilns, with limited entrance to tourists and limited usage for local ceramic artists.

With strong support from the local government, Longquan celadon was revived, and was selected as part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 list. Longquan celadon is China's only ceramic recognized by UNESCO Cultural Heritage, largely increasing the reputation of Longquan celadon worldwide.²⁷

Mass-produced vs. Boutique Ceramics

Two modes of management systems influenced by different political power have led to two results in local artifact industry. The central-led development of the Jingdezhen ceramic industry has made the city play a role as an industrial accelerator for development policy and strategy, rather than a role related to the industry's cultural and artistic characteristics. In Longquan's case, however, rather than focus on profit-drive and large volume production, the local-led development strategy and policies have largely emphasized and protected the local artifact's cultural essence and symbolic value. After the intervening decades, two significant ceramic clusters with long histories in producing high-value ceramic products have diverged in their developmental paths: Jingdezhen is on its path with mass producing artifacts with low symbolic value but high total output value, while Longquan has increasingly boutique ceramic studios with a small quantity of ceramic production, high symbolic value, and comparatively low total output.

Central-led ceramic industry development largely decreases the "distinction" of artifacts. "Distinction" here indicates the variety of industries in the city level, and the potential for mutual promotion between ceramics and other industries. Though the ceramic industry has been a dominant industry in Jingdezhen, historically many other industries also developed with the prosperous market of ceramic products. With the convenience of water transportation and the flourishing ceramic trading in ancient Jingdezhen, a large number of people like business people, artists, and tourists came and went frequently.²⁸ Thus, ancient Jingdezhen was ceramic-centered, attracting talented people, skilled labors, and other service industries to this commercial center. However, influenced by the central

government and its centrally-controlled management system, the establishment of SOEs replaced previous individual studios and their mode of art creation.

Strictures and requirements for inputs and outputs strongly limited the potential development of ceramic-related industries. As I mentioned in section 3, the majority of the population worked under the SOE framework and followed these requirements from the central government. Additionally, the state council started a program of the selection of masters and an assessment system including a professional qualification. The Master of Chinese arts and crafts is a national honor awarded to domestic craft artists. The professional qualification is mainly organized by the provincial government, which also influences the income and welfare of SOEs. The higher professional qualifications an SOE employee has, the higher income they will get. This leads those who work for SOEs to strive for increasing professionalization. However, because the qualification is issued and evaluated by a department of the central government instead of professional ceramic experts, it emphasizes a strong political image in the artwork. The pursuit for high professional qualification also restricts local artists and talented ceramic workers in creating ceramic products.

In another case, the Longquan ceramic industry is led by the local government, which has more autonomous decision-making ability in its development of the local cultural industry. Over time, artists in Longquan has made bold innovations on the basis of heritage. In the 1990s they replaced wood kilns and coal-fired round kilns with a liquefied gas shuttle kiln, which significantly improves production efficiency and guarantees ceramic production quality. The introduction of the liquefied gas kiln guarantees the quality and grade of celadon products, since this kiln's characteristics include that: the temperature rises during heating and the heat preservation and the temperature drop are easy to control; the temperature difference in the kiln can be as small as $\pm 5^{\circ}\text{C}$; and the atmosphere in the kiln is easy to control.²⁹ According to municipal reports from Longquan in 2017, there were 2,779 ceramic related patents at the end of 2016, with 297 national and provincial level patents among them.³⁰ These patents include innovations in artistic creation, ceramic material improvement, sculpting techniques, glaze techniques, and the forms of ceramic products. Jingdezhen had 884 total patents, with only 158 national and provincial level patents.³¹ UNESCO recognition of Longquan's ceramic traditional skills also helped Longquan to increase its global reputation.

Jingdezhen and Longquan share similar historical ceramic reputations and geographical locations in the Yangtze Delta region. Yet different strategies of political power and its management systems have led the two cities into diverging developmental paths. Jingdezhen's mass production earns the city output volume and standardized management in the urban area. Longquan's boutique production not only protects traditional heritage skills but also largely improves the local artifacts' symbolic value and cultural meaning in contemporary China.

Conclusion

From an industrial output view, Jingdezhen has done a great job in mass production and standardized production process. However, ceramic artifacts are different from traditional manufacturing industries, which are characterized by large volume production and reproducible products. According to the Chinese official classification, ceramics and the ceramics industry belong to the Core layer of the nation's culture-related industries. These products are usually those directly involved in the production of social meaning, with symbolic values, and thus those who work in this field are identified as involved in "symbolic creativity."³² In Longquan's case, the local ceramic industry involved creative thinking and cultural protection even during the industry's development process, which significantly increased the symbolic value of Longquan celadon products.








The balance between the political power of the central government and the local government has always been a research topic in China. In the Chinese context, a central-government-led project or industry always means it will get more resources, which includes both financial support and preferential policies. These favorable measures typically mean the specific project or industry will have a great chance to grow quickly.

The management of the central government is concentrated, standardized, and rule-driven, and thus easy to control, especially in SOEs. One of the problems is that the central government is located in the capital, but at the local level Chinese cities have different historical backgrounds and economic situations. Standardized management tends to make cities more and more similar. Like globalization's negative impact on local cultural products, nationalization has also made these cultural artifacts grow in the pattern of mass production, which dismantles core cultural values during the development process. In the case of Jingdezhen, thousands of years of reputation as producing high value ceramic art and products has been gradually transformed to reputation for large volume production and low artistic value.

Moreover, symbolic creators are crucial in developing an industry for cultural artifacts.³³ Centralized control of cultural artifacts and standardized production rules give artists and creators little space to create and design new products and technology. Jingdezhen's central-led development strategy gives artists, especially young people, limited space to create, since ceramic products have been given excessive political imagery instead of artistic meaning. Longquan's local-led development strategy, on the other hand, provides local ceramic artists and creators a platform to carry out their ideas in ceramic creation. In turn, this platform attracts more talented people and symbolic creators, especially the younger generation, into the city, which gives the city a sustainable relationship between artists, city innovation, and the business environment.

In sum, the central government plays a crucial role in improving the cultural industry from a national level, because it establishes the national development strategy and supports provincial and local governments in many ways. The cultural artifacts industry also needs a localized strategy because cultural background varies from city to city, and cultural value is the most crucial part of the products. In this regard, giving increased autonomy to the local government in developing its local cultural artifacts would positively improve cultural artifacts' core symbolic values and make the industry attractive to potential artists.

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Author Information

Chang Liu

Chang Liu is a post-doc researcher in the College of Design and Innovation at Tongji University in Shanghai, China. Her past work has looked at cultural value and innovation system of the cultural industries. Chang's current research analyzes the design-driven social innovation at the community level. She received her PhD in Urban Planning and Design from the University of Hong Kong and her Master's from the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University.

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Introduction: US Gun Culture and the Performance of Racial Sovereignty

by Lindsay Livingston and Alex Trimble Young | Gun Culture, Issue 9.1
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ABSTRACT This introduction examines gun culture in the United States and argues that it is a product of the longstanding practices of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, and misogyny that have shaped life in the United States. Invoking an anthropological definition of culture, it argues that gun violence is a central facet of US political and social life and that performances of gun use and ownership, particularly when enacted by white men, embody a kind of "racial sovereignty," or a violent limitation of the practical applicability of citizenship to those who promulgate whiteness, maleness, and violence as primary markers of full belonging in the civic community.

KEYWORDS anti-Blackness, gun culture, performance, settler colonialism, sovereignty, United States

At around 10:20 a.m. on August 3, 2019, Patrick Crusius walked into a Walmart in El Paso, Texas armed with a WASR-10 rifle (a semi-automatic version of an AK-47) and wearing noise-suppressing headphones to protect his hearing. He had driven over 600 miles from his home in Allen, Texas, with a single goal in mind: to kill Mexicans. Minutes before he began shooting, Crusius had posted a chilling white supremacist manifesto to the website 8-Chan. In it, he ranted about a "Hispanic invasion of Texas" and claimed that the only solution to this perceived affront was to "get rid of enough people."¹ After killing twenty-two people and injuring twenty-five others, Crusius drove to a nearby intersection, climbed out of his car with his hands up, identified himself as the shooter to police, and surrendered.²

In the familiar public outrage that followed this act of racial terror, there was a strange consensus that emerged across conservative and liberal responses in the media. While the shooter and his ideology should be condemned, these responses argued, there exists a "gun culture" that must be respected, in spite of its potential contribution to such repeated events of spectacular firearm violence. In a feature on the response to the shooting, *The Guardian* concludes that the shooting was "unlikely to dent [the] state's gun culture" and quotes a Houston-area gun enthusiast's response to the tragedy: "'We are Texas,' he claims, 'because of guns.'"³ Covering country singer Kacey Musgraves' call for gun control after the shooting, the *Washington Post* writes that "[Musgraves] pointed out that she hailed from Texas and was familiar with hunting and gun culture."⁴ In an op-ed for *Politico* entitled "What Both Sides Don't Get about American Gun Culture," political scientist Jonathan Obert and legal scholar Austin Sarat call firearms a "social glue" and warn gun reformers not to push too hard against gun owners, whose investment in that ownership amounts to a group identity. Obert and Sarat continue:

Gun owners need assurance that liberal gun reform advocates will not march down a slippery slope from red-flag laws, regulating semi-automatic weapons and large capacity magazines and closing the gun-show loophole to intrusive regulations that start to break down a culture that millions of people value greatly—one that enriches their lives and whose roots go back before America's founding.⁵

In these varied examples, the “culture” in gun culture is understood in the anthropological sense, a complex whole constitutive of an entire political and social reality and its attendant collective identity (“We are Texas because of guns”). For opponents of gun reform, this understanding of gun culture stands as a straightforward justification for resistance to gun regulation. For gun reform advocates, it stands as a piety that must be observed to underscore the moderation of their reformist agenda. But what is this culture that has come to be seen as inviolable by both sides of the gun debate?

The phrase “gun culture” yokes a broad category of technology to one of the most notoriously multivalent keywords in humanistic thought. As a result, it has the potential to describe a wildly heterogeneous set of phenomena. Indeed, as sociologist David Yamane has argued, it is perhaps futile to lump practices ranging from duck hunting to doomsday prepping to Black self-defense collectives under the singular category of gun culture.⁶ Wary of this potential flattening effect of describing all gun use in the United States as a singular “culture,” many scholars instead focus on specific historical moments, discrete communities, or precise physical rituals associated with gun culture. These studies resist drawing broad conclusions about a pervasive gun culture and instead make narrowly circumscribed claims.⁷ Another influential branch of gun studies examines “the vital agency in the gun itself” and often eschews the concept of a “gun culture” altogether.⁸ This materialist analysis, arguably inaugurated by Bruno Latour’s “On Technical Mediation,” in which he ruminates on the NRA’s infamous “guns don’t kill people, people kill people” slogan, centers the gun as an object that is fundamentally different from other objects in the way it impacts human behavior.⁹

Nonetheless, as the responses to the mass shooting in El Paso demonstrate, when “the gun” is invoked as a problem in the United States, a singular “gun culture” surely follows. Rather than dismiss this usage as a misapprehension, we argue that it in fact describes a hegemonic gun culture—culture here conceived in the anthropological sense outlined above—that has enabled the normative political, juridical, and social contexts in which the widespread circulation of privately owned firearms renders the proliferation of gun “cultures” possible.¹⁰ The essays in this forum examine specific case studies and foundational political concepts as a means to understand this hegemonic gun culture, its historical continuities and transformations, the identities and behaviors it produces, and its relationship to broader structures of racial and colonial violence. Though the United States can be described as containing a plurality of gun culture(s) rather than a singular expression of gun affinity, a continued critique of this normative gun culture is nevertheless necessary.¹¹

This forum examines how this normative gun culture has been shaped by long histories of settler colonialism and chattel slavery, producing ongoing cycles of violence that harm all Americans but have disproportionate impacts on Indigenous and Black people. We examine how ideologies of white supremacy and their reliance on both legal and extralegal violence have produced the United States’ exceptionally toxic gun culture. This culture’s entrenched nature makes it impossible to produce meaningful public policy solutions that curtail the everyday gun violence committed with firearms without first confronting the

racist and misogynist legacies that underpin firearm use. Gun culture in the United States, as these essays demonstrate, exists within “the total climate” of anti-Blackness. This, coupled with the continuing effects of settler colonialism means that the proliferation and excessive use of firearms in the US creates a culture in which “the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death” can be carried out by anyone with access to a gun.¹² We analyze how performances of gun use and ownership, particularly when enacted by white men, embody a kind of “racial sovereignty,” or a violent limitation of the practical applicability of citizenship to those who promulgate whiteness, maleness, and violence as primary markers of full belonging in the civic community.¹³

The gun emerges as an agent in public discourse in a relatively circumscribed set of circumstances. Following a particular kind of public mass shooting—generally committed by a (white) man, in a neutral public place, and targeting people unknown to the shooter—there is a broad outcry about “the gun,” met with an equally vociferous redirection onto “the shooter.” Talk of banning certain firearms is met with rebuttals that emphasize the mental or moral capacity of the perpetrator of the mass shooting. Arguments that “guns kill” inspire the retort that “guns don’t kill, people do.” And yet, only one percent of firearm deaths are the result of a public mass shooting.¹⁴ The spectacular nature of these events, however, has catalyzed a national conversation about the distinct gun culture that produces them, while at the same time eliding the everyday violence that many Americans, particularly those in segregated and underserved communities, live with. The elisions themselves are telling. The gun rarely enters the public consciousness as an object with agency in relation to the imperial violence of the US military operating around the world, or in response to police shooting an unarmed Black man, or in cases of domestic or workplace violence. The spectacular public mass shooting thus becomes a metonym for the multiple kinds of gun violence that Americans live with daily. But emphasizing the individual shooter’s motivation and the individual gun’s technical capacity obfuscates the political and ideological dimensions of this violence. Almost always, mass public shooters in the United States are white and male. These “exceptional citizens,” as Inderpal Grewal calls them, enact spectacular violence upon a crowd in a public space as a means to assert their sovereignty over the public sphere.¹⁵

The shooter as exceptional citizen is a white man who is the inheritor of the structural outcomes of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous gun violence practiced on behalf of genocidal frontier conquest and brutal chattel slavery. The right to bear arms enshrined in the US Constitution remains a right conditioned, in deed if not in word, by the bearer’s proximity to whiteness. The sovereign violence performed by the public mass shooter enabled by that right and fetishized in the object of the gun is the expression of a *racial* sovereignty. If the United States *is* a gun culture, then mass shootings are but one manifestation of that culture, and a very small one at that. They are, nevertheless, representative of some of the core issues at stake in negotiating that culture. Mass shootings command so much attention because they are performative acts that dramatize outstanding and unresolved questions about the nature of sovereign power in the United States. The mass shooter is a man who flaunts his power to decide “who may live and who must die” over a population.¹⁶

Understanding the gun less as an agential object than as one that grants necropolitical power to those who wield it can illuminate the discrepant responses that US gun violence engenders. Because the issues of sovereignty and masculinity that drive mass shooters are so clearly bound up in the United States’ long-time enmeshment with white supremacy, white male shooters are often positioned as individualistic and agential, but

suffering—whether it be from mental illness, video games, or the gun itself, which imposes its power upon him. Nearly every explanation of mass shootings undertaken by white perpetrators elides the political and ideological dimensions of this violence. In the case of mass shootings perpetrated by individuals who are not white, however, agency is often attributed to broad political forces perceived as exogenous to normative US culture. For example, in the San Bernardino and Pulse Nightclub shootings, the shooters' putative ties to ISIS quickly eclipsed questions about their relation to "gun culture" in the public imagination.¹⁷

The impasse at which the nation inevitably arrives following these events hinges on a disagreement regarding how the command of violence should be reconfigured among US citizens. The conservative right argues that the democratic distribution of necropolitical power is necessary for citizens to protect themselves not only from private violence and other forms of crime but also from the power of a potentially tyrannical state. Both these claims are self-evidently fantasies. In the first instance, studies have shown over and over that a gun in the home is more likely to be used against a member of the household itself than in the prevention of crime; in the second, the superior firepower held by the state will inevitably outstrip that held by individual citizens.¹⁸ In contesting these positions, the liberal left has focused almost exclusively on the gun as an object rather than on an effort to understand the affective dimensions of this fantasy as such. This focus has manifested in an emphasis on regulating the gun as technology rather than interrogating how the gun as symbol continues to mobilize an ideological community that has rendered that regulation almost impossible.

The essays in this forum confront this aporia by foregrounding the "culture" side of the ubiquitous yet undertheorized "gun culture" formulation. Including but not limited to the analysis of cultural production as such, each in its own way explores how hegemonic gun culture continues to shape political subjectivities and juridical structures around a violent conception of racial sovereignty. By invoking an anthropological conception of culture that reads gun violence as a central facet of political and social life in the United States, these essays suggest that addressing our national epidemic of gun violence may require a fundamental "revolution of values" rather than technocratic reforms.¹⁹

This assertion invites us to return to the essay that brought the term "gun culture" into widespread use, Richard Hofstadter's 1970 "The United States as a Gun Culture."²⁰ By 1970, many dimensions of our contemporary gun crisis were already evident: increasing numbers of US Americans had collected military-grade arms as they flooded the market following the end of World War II; gun deaths in the US—from murder, suicide, and accidental fire—far outpaced those in peer nations; and the number of people killed by gun violence in the twentieth century thus far was larger than the total number of US soldiers who had been killed in battle—in all wars combined. Emphasizing the culpability of the trigger-puller as well as the shocking proliferation of firearms, Hofstadter argues that the United States' gun culture privileges "assassins, professional criminals, berserk murderers, and political terrorists at the expense of the orderly population," threatening to rend the civic fabric of the nation. He closes his essay railing against the seeming impossibility to affect meaningful political action in response:

A nation that could not devise a system of gun control after its experiences of the 1960's, and at a moment of profound popular revulsion against guns, is not likely to get such a system in the calculable future. One must wonder how grave a domestic gun catastrophe would have to be in order to persuade us. How far must things go?

If Hofstadter's analysis of gun violence in his moment echoes disquietingly with our own, so too does his analysis of the culture that enables it. While his essay betrays many of the myopias of white liberals of his time—he imperiously dismisses Susan Sontag's description of settler conquest as "genocide," to give but one example—he nonetheless locates the origins of US gun culture in the violence of the settler frontier and the slave patrols. He argues that the culture that emerged from these founding moments of racialized violence, tempered by a long English tradition of mistrust for militarized state power, was one whose "answer to civic and military decadence, real or imagined, was the armed yeoman." For Hofstadter it is this figure, having outlived the conditions of his origins yet essential to white American men's conception of their own masculine autonomy, that subtends gun violence. In his conclusion, Hofstadter notes with some anxiety—indeed, quite possibly the anxiety that spurred him to write the piece—that this tendency bridges traditional right and left divides, and that "militant young blacks [are] borrowing the white man's mystique and accepting the gun as their instrument."²¹

While Hofstadter was penning "America as a Gun Culture," Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz was one of the armed radical leftists that he decries. In her influential 2018 book *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*, Dunbar-Ortiz repudiates armed resistance as a tactic while maintaining her commitment to revolutionary politics.²² In her wide-ranging critique, she targets both gun culture and liberal scholarship that she reads as obfuscating the Second Amendment's roots in racial violence. She offers Hofstadter qualified praise for recognizing "the historical roots that might explain the violence wrought by civilian gun use" even as she critiques him for not establishing a causal link between this violence and the inclusion of the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights.²³ Dunbar-Ortiz links gun culture to the foundational violence of the frontier and slave patrols, but argues that the private ownership of firearms is not an embarrassing relic of a bygone era but rather a crucial means of bolstering ongoing racial and colonial domination. Nonetheless, like Hofstadter, she calls attention to the ways in which cultural representation both subtends and is enabled by these structures of violence. While her critique lacks any of the racial anxiety that arguably colors Hofstadter's, she too sees a distinct danger in armed leftist militancy becoming ensnared in what she calls "gun love." In describing her own period of armed militancy, she describes her feminist collective arming themselves and in the process succumbing to a "passion that was inappropriate to our political objectives, and [that] ended up distorting and determining them."²⁴

The erotically charged language ("love" "passion") that Dunbar-Ortiz employs here gives voice to an understanding of the gun as an object that functions as a strange kind of fetish. Despite the historical and ideological gulf that separates them, this is an approach that Dunbar-Ortiz and Hofstadter could be said to share. While Hofstadter rejects a rote Freudian reading of the gun's status as a phallic object, Hofstadter's gun, like Marx's commodity, is an object only made legible through a consideration of the violent intersubjective relationships that subtend its circulation. Like Freud's fetish, Dunbar-Ortiz's gun is cathected with an affective power that draws individuals into those relationships even as they attempt to resist them.

The essays in this forum explore the relationships of domination that the gun fetishizes, and in so doing attempt to render legible the tangle of everyday actions, postures, and ideologies that support and promote the proliferation of guns and gun violence in US life. The first essay, "The Self-Defeating Notion of the Sovereign Subject in US Gun Culture" <<https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/self-defeating-notion-sovereign-subject-kautzer/>> by Chad Kautzer, examines how doctrines of popular sovereignty and the

sovereign subject have both upheld white supremacy throughout US history and continue to influence contemporary gun culture rhetorics and attitudes, in spite of the fact that the very concept of a "sovereign subject" is unrealizable. Kautzer argues that the employment of popular sovereignty systematizes unequal social relationships via the use of extralegal violence, which in turn establishes the precedent that enables the codification of those unequal relationships in law. Kautzer then asserts that the concept of the sovereign subject—a concept that underpins much of contemporary gun culture—is fundamentally contradictory and "self-defeating." Indeed, Kautzer argues, in claiming the right to exert lethal power over others at any given moment, gun owners decrease their own personal freedom by unraveling the social agreements that in fact reduce their (and others') injurability. Kautzer's observation that no event of gun violence could convince "aspiring sovereign subjects" to give up their right to use a firearm to impose their will on others emphasizes that the culture produced by widespread gun proliferation is a fractured, atomized one that is ultimately incapable of putting the needs of the many to survive and thrive ahead of the desire of a few to ensure their total individual invulnerability.

Caroline Light's contribution, "[On Civil Rights, Armed Citizens®, and Historical Overdose](https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/on-civil-rights-armed-citizens-and-historical-overdose-light/)," < <https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/on-civil-rights-armed-citizens-and-historical-overdose-light/>> takes a historical view of the National Rifle Association's claim that they are "America's longest-standing civil rights organization."²⁵ Light situates the NRA's false assertion within the history of Black armed community defense and, in so doing, demonstrates how this appropriation of the legacy of anti-racist activism serves to reassert social dynamics that privilege white, male gun owners while increasing the precarity of already vulnerable communities, particularly those that are overcriminalized and underserved by the state. Claims like the NRA's, which try to whitewash history and insist that the right to bear arms is, in fact, applied in a "colorblind" manner, selectively use history to occlude the racist origins and effects of gun rights laws and their application. Drawing on Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Light describes this co-option of Civil Rights legacies as an example of "historical overdose," a scenario in which people become "complaisant hostages of the pasts they create."²⁶ Light warns of the danger in seeing gun culture as simply an absolutist version of sovereign armed citizenship and insists that we recognize the racialized processes that underpin *both* gun rights and gun control efforts—the anti-Blackness at the heart of normative US gun culture.


"[The Necropolitics of Liberty: Sovereignty, Fantasy, and United States Gun Culture](https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/necropolitics-of-liberty-sovereignty-fantasy-us-gun-culture-young/)," < <https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/necropolitics-of-liberty-sovereignty-fantasy-us-gun-culture-young/>> by Alex Trimble Young, finds in the survivalist novels of the paramilitary right an archive that reveals the uncomfortable proximity of the speculative fictions of that subculture to more mainstream narratives. In a reading of the novel *Only By Blood and Suffering* by LaVoy Finicum, the militant killed during the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, Young argues that Finicum's allegory of a post-apocalyptic restoration of settler sovereignty cannot be understood as one exogenous to the fantasies that undergird the constituted power of the United States. Reading contemporary liberal rhetoric against Finicum's ideologically charged novel, Young argues that neither conservative nor liberal rhetoric challenges the notion that gun violence played a salutary role on the settler colonial frontier, which both sides understand as a site productive of democratic values. This affirmation of the frontier past allows the survivalist novel to unapologetically project "the law-making violence of the frontier . . . into the future as fantasy" whereas it leaves liberals with a contradictory orientation toward that history wherein "the disavowal of settler colonial violence is paired with an often barely sublimated desire for its return." This contradiction in liberal ideology is


symptomatic, Young argues, of a refusal to recognize the need for a radical break from the material and symbolic underpinnings of white settler colonialism that would be necessary to overcome the ongoing structures of violence that govern life in the United States. By recognizing the elements of classical liberal ideology at the heart of Finicum's survivalist novel, Young suggests, we can begin to understand the radical orientation necessary to contest his politics.











Finally, Lindsay Livingston's "[Good \[Black\] Guys With Guns](https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/good-black-guys-with-guns-livingston/)" <<https://csalateral.org/forum/gun-culture/good-black-guys-with-guns-livingston/>> explores how embodied performances inform the necropolitical decisions made by police officers during encounters with armed suspects. Livingston examines the case of E.J. Bradford, a concealed carry permit holder who was shot and killed by police while he was attempting an armed intervention against a potential mass shooter in an Alabama mall in 2018. In so doing, she interrogates "one of the primary modalities of contemporary gun culture," the notion that there is a stable division between "good guys with guns" and "bad guys with guns." Livingston argues that, in moments of police encounter with armed citizens, this supposedly "ontological binary," much like the friend/enemy distinction that Carl Schmitt conceptualized as foundational to political community, is shaped not by the law but by an individual's decision.²⁷ Analyzing the Attorney General's report that exonerated the anonymous police officer who killed Bradford, Livingston finds not an objective standard of "reasonableness" that guides the officer's decision, but rather a legal aporia that left the officer to rely on broader cultural scripts to guide his actions. Embodied police behavior in such instances stands as an example of "restored behavior," Livingston argues, performances that are not just rehearsed "through formalized training of [officer's] bodies," but are "scripted by centuries of racialized thinking." Livingston demonstrates how such scripts become embedded in legal standards themselves by showing how, in the Bradford case, the Attorney General's test of "reasonableness" falls back on the question of what other law enforcement officers would have done in the same situation, creating a self-reinforcing tautology that bolsters racialized scripts for armed performance even as it purports to see beyond them.
















By reading the rhetoric and performances that shape twenty-first-century gun culture in the United States in the context of the *longue durée* of racial and colonial violence in North America, this forum seeks to reframe the public conversation about gun culture and shift the discussion away from its focus on right/left political distinctions and debates about the relationship between popular sovereignty and the liberal state. By foregrounding the ongoing role that anti-Blackness and settler colonialism play in shaping United States gun culture, we hope to illuminate how state and private gun violence in the United States can only be contested by confronting these ongoing structures of violence.

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Author Information

Lindsay Livingston

Lindsay Livingston is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Theater and Dance at Bowdoin College. Livingston's work investigates the intersections between performance, race, violence, and public space. Her current book project, *Extraordinary Violence: Performance, Race, and Gun Culture in the United States*, argues that gun culture in the United States is reflective of and conditioned by racialized performances of citizenship and public inclusion, both onstage and in everyday life.

[View all of Lindsay Livingston's articles.](#)

Alex Trimble Young

Alex Trimble Young is an Honors Faculty Fellow in Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. Young is a scholar of transnational settler colonialism and United States literature and culture. His forthcoming book, *The Frontiers of Dissent: The Settler Colonial Imaginary in U.S. Literature after 1945*, focuses on how the oppositional literature in the contemporary U.S. has been shaped by the ongoing history of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance.

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Good [Black] Guys With Guns: Performance and the Anti-Black Logic of US Gun Culture

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ABSTRACT This article examines the police shooting of twenty-one-year-old E.J. Bradford at the Riverchase Galleria in Hoover, Alabama on November 22, 2018. After a brief investigation, the Alabama Attorney General's Office absolved the officer who shot Bradford of any wrongdoing. Through a close reading of the Alabama AG's report and a performance analysis of Bradford's actions that night, this article argues that Bradford behaved exactly as he was trained to as a concealed carry permit holder and former enlistee in the Army. Bradford was the epitome of the NRA's vaunted "good guy with a gun" who intervenes in a violent situation to save others' lives. However, within the context of the United States's gun culture, which envisions "good" gun owners as white and encourages police to rehearse responses that perpetuate anti-Black racism, Bradford was always going to be seen by police as suspect.

KEYWORDS anti-Blackness, gun culture, performance, police, police brutality, United States

When a man entered the Riverchase Galleria in Hoover, Alabama on Thanksgiving night and began shooting at shoppers, E. J. Bradford ran away from the sound of gunfire. After a few seconds, though, Bradford turned back toward the scene of the shooting, took out the concealed firearm he was carrying, and prepared to use it to defend himself and others from the assailant. In doing so, Bradford enacted a long-mythologized tradition of American "do-it-yourself-defense."¹ A holder of a concealed carry permit, a former member of the US Army, and the son of a correctional officer, Bradford was the epitome of a "good guy with a gun."² Moments after Bradford began chasing the assailant, however, a Hoover police officer spotted him wielding a gun and assumed Bradford was the attacker. The officer shot twenty-one-year-old Bradford three times. An autopsy determined that, contrary to initial reports from the police department, Bradford had been running away when he was shot.³ Police initially told reporters that Bradford, who had been shopping with a friend, was a suspect in the shooting and that he had "brandished" the gun before the officer killed him; they later rescinded both claims.⁴ Embedded in the police's claims that Bradford had comported himself *as if* he were a criminal (by being in the vicinity of the original shooting and brandishing a gun), was an unacknowledged yet vital visual clue as to why the officer may have suspected that Bradford was not a good guy, but instead a bad guy, with a gun: E. J. Bradford was Black.⁵

Nearly two and a half months after Bradford was killed, the Alabama attorney general's office released a report absolving the officer involved of any wrongdoing. The report begins and ends on the same argument: although the officer shot and killed Bradford, he did not commit a crime by doing so. The first page of the report establishes this claim: "After an extensive investigation and review, the Attorney General has determined that

Officer 1 did not commit a crime under Alabama law when he shot and killed E. J. Bradford.”⁶ The final page of the report reiterates it: “Officer 1 reasonably exercised his official duties, powers, or functions when he shot E.J. Bradford on the night of November 22, 2018.”⁷ The report is meant to “provide maximum transparency” and assuage community fears that police used unnecessary force when they killed Bradford; it offers photographic evidence and eyewitness testimony to support Officer 1’s misidentification of Bradford as the shooter rather than an innocent bystander.⁸ At the same time, the report resists transparency by failing to include other eyewitness’ claims that Bradford was guiding people safely out of the mall.⁹ Both the report itself and the event it ostensibly illuminates rely on descriptions of embodied behaviors—performances—that are classified as innocent or as criminal under the law. These performances then shape who is identified as a “good” wielder of a gun and who is identified as a “bad” wielder of a gun and can trigger deadly choreographies between law-abiding citizens and law enforcement officers, scripted by centuries of racialized thinking.

The United States is a country bristling with firearms.¹⁰ It is also a country with a robust gun culture rooted in a violent political founding that required the subjugation of enslaved Africans and the forcible displacement and genocide of Indigenous nations for its success.¹¹ These deep and broad histories of white supremacy, which are entrenched in the founding documents, juridical structures, cultural myths, and individual performances of US American identity, shape what is possible and probable within a culture of widespread civilian gun ownership. For Black Americans, the exceptionally high rate of civilian gun ownership coupled with the pervasive devaluing of Black life throughout US history contributes to a higher likelihood of death by civilian firearm and of death at the hands of a police officer.¹² This gun violence is an example of the “quotidian catastrophic events” that Christina Sharpe argues contribute to and reproduce “antiblackness as total climate.”¹³

One of the primary modalities of contemporary gun culture is identifying gun users as either good guys or bad guys. This concept roots gun use in a steadfast ontological binary; you are either a good guy (with a gun) or not. The exact phrasing is a result of both reductive thinking and political marketing. In a 1997 interview on *Meet the Press*, Charlton Heston, the soon-to-be-president of the National Rifle Association (NRA), articulated an early version of the idea: “Let me make a short, opening, blanket comment,” he told Tim Russert. “There are no ‘good guns.’ There are no ‘bad guns.’ Any gun in the hands of a decent person is no threat to anyone—except bad people.”¹⁴ Fifteen years later, following the murder of twenty first-graders and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, the NRA held a press conference to respond to the mass murder. In his speech, Wayne LaPierre, the Executive Vice President of the NRA, riffed on Heston’s earlier statement and emphasized an ontological “goodness” that adhered to some gun owners and a “badness” that adhered to others. “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun,” he exclaimed, “is a good guy with a gun.”¹⁵ According to the NRA, this pithy phrase has become a “motto for Second Amendment support across the nation.”¹⁶ This assessment is at least anecdotally true; gun culture groups with this tagline proliferate on Facebook and other social media sites, offering spaces for participants to “share stories about real life incidents where law abiding citizens have used firearms to defend themselves or others from violent crime,” and the NRA sells merchandise with the phrase emblazoned on it.¹⁷

Articulations of the “good guy with a gun” theory—that you can prevent gun violence by carrying a gun—assume that the definition of a “law abiding citizen” is ontologically stable,

self-evident, and easily discernable in a moment of violent confrontation. In fact, such moments often happen in a matter of seconds as police officers (and others) make split-second decisions about who in the situation is the aggressor and who is the victim. In media accounts of police killings, the racialized thinking that influences these kind of instantaneous decisions is often called “implicit bias.”¹⁸ I propose that a more complete way to understand this often subconscious racism, and the actions it provokes, is as restored behavior, a term Richard Schechner defines as “performed actions that people train for and rehearse.”¹⁹ Importantly, the concept of restored behavior emphasizes the iterative embodied actions that are a corollary to the attitudes articulated by implicit bias. Schechner goes on to explain that, though such rehearsal is easier to identify in art and ritual, this same standard can be applied to everyday life: that is, we rehearse our identities everyday by remixing and performing that which we have seen, and even sensed, before.²⁰ Importantly, “restored behavior” implies an embodied, rote dimension to our everyday performances of self. We learn by repetition, and that repetition soon begins to feel natural, though it remains, essentially, a performance. Rather than devaluing behavior by considering it “performance,” the concept of restored behavior argues that *all* embodied actions are repetitions of earlier performed behavior, including things like how we hold our bodies when we walk, how we interact with other people, and how we “read” a room when we enter it. Thus, police officers “rehearse” not just through formalized training of their bodies in preparation for encounters with the public they are tasked to protect, but also through their own familial and cultural histories, which they bring to the job. Police officers in the United States carry histories of white supremacy and antiblackness with them into the field, and those cultural histories are embedded in their bodily movements and split-second decisions. In this way, white supremacy is transformed, even in the absence of conscious malice, into police violence against Black Americans.

The idea of all behavior as restored also helps explain why the law-as-text—for example, the law that Bradford could legally carry his firearm and use it for self-defense because he was licensed to do so in the state of Alabama—is so often quite different from the law-in-action. Though the text may say one thing, the repetition of certain behaviors creates the conditions for legitimate legality, or the possibility for citizens to actually partake of the rights assured by law. The attorney general’s report is a clear example of this principle in action: the entire document is a process of interpreting the law-as-text through the prism of the night’s events in order to arrive at an explanation of the law-in-action. Although shooting and killing someone who is not a danger to others would seem to be a crime, the report determines that Officer 1’s actions were “justified and not criminal,” and that he acted as a “reasonable officer would have under the circumstances.”²¹ In this way, the report is also a process of interpreting the law-as-text through the prism of expectations of restored behavior—that any “reasonable” officer would interpret an armed Black man’s performance in this given situation as already criminal, regardless of what laws, if any, are being broken. The text of the law is always subjugated to the performance of the law in determining actual applicability.

When it identifies the officer’s response as a “reasonable” performance of duty, the report relies on an ill-defined guideline of what is reasonable behavior. Objective reasonableness, which was determined as the appropriate standard for assessing claims of excessive force against police in the Supreme Court case *Graham v. Connor* (1989), is left purposely vague in the final decision, written by Justice William Rehnquist. Citing an earlier case, Rehnquist argues that “the test of reasonableness under the Fourth Amendment is not capable of precise definition or mechanical application.”²² While the standard is, in legal terms, meant to allow for flexibility in determining an acceptable level of force in any given

encounter with the police, in practice it results in encounters that repeat previous choreographies of engagement. Actions become authorized or legitimated through repetition—the more often that Black people are killed or brutalized by police, and the more often that such treatment is circulated via social media and traditional news platforms, the more such treatment can be interpreted as “reasonable” and dismissed.²³ The restored behaviors of centuries of abusive and oppressive policing of Black communities come to feel natural, or, in legal parlance, “reasonable.” As one officer who was at the mall that night, but did not witness the shooting, testified, he “believed Officer 1 perceived that E. J. Bradford posed a threat and took enforcement action, as every law enforcement officer would have done in that situation.”²⁴ The standard of objective reasonableness in this statement becomes a tautology: the officer was right because the officer chose to do what he did—which made it right.

Conjoined with the covert restored behaviors that devalue Black life, particularly during police encounters, officers also train in overtly performed behaviors in an attempt to embed these behaviors in their own bodies, or to make them second-nature. These trainings are essentially rehearsals in which officers learn to rapidly quantify a situation and classify participants according to threat level. This tactical training is outlined in the attorney general’s report and used to bolster the claim that the officer behaved reasonably. The report describes Officer 1’s training in the Texas State University-sponsored active shooter training program, Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERT).²⁵ During ALERT instruction, officers are “trained how to scan persons at an active shooting scene to differentiate between innocent civilians, first responders, and actors/suspects.”²⁶ The training requires that officers “recognize that innocent life must be defended above all” and that officers must “eliminate any threat posed by actors or suspects toward innocent civilians.”²⁷ Such training presents a similar problem as the designation of a good guy or a law-abiding citizen with a gun. How should one identify who qualifies as an innocent civilian and who qualifies as an actor? ALERT trains officers to “scan” people on the scene of an active shooting and ask the following questions: 1) is the person “postured and moving like another first responder, victim, or shooter?” 2) “Is he wearing a uniform that identifies him as another first responder?” and 3) “Do you recognize this person as a non-combatant?”²⁸

Officer 1, the report argues, put this training into use when he came upon the active shooter scene at the Riverchase Galleria. After assessing the scene, he determined that Bradford was a threat because he did not have on a police uniform, he had his gun out, and he was running toward the victim (who was on the floor, wounded) rather than running away.²⁹ Officer 1’s classification of people at the scene into certain roles, however, relied as much on his own gut feeling about who was a threat as it did any definitive characteristics. Bradford’s “bladed shooting stance,” which demonstrated the firearms training he would have received in the Army, could just as easily identified him as a protector rather than an actor/suspect.³⁰ For the officer, a bladed stance indicated only an intention to engage, rather than evident training in tactical self-defense. The fact that Bradford was sprinting *toward* the injured person, rather than away from him, likewise could have indicated his defensive engagement with whomever just shot the man on the ground. The actions that police and the attorney general identified as those of an actor/suspect are also the embodied movements taught in Army, concealed carry, and self-defense courses. Though the officer did not realize it at the time, the man on the ground was E. J. Bradford’s friend; Bradford, after first running briefly away from the scene in panic, returned to protect his loved one.












One of the most callous moments in the report comes near the end. The attorney general has laid out his primary claims of absolution, but nevertheless opts to include a final note:





















While it is now known that E. J. Bradford did not shoot Brian Wilson [Bradford's friend], Bradford still posed an immediate deadly threat to persons in the area. Video evidence suggests that Bradford, who was carrying a firearm, was running toward the initial shooter, Erron Brown, who was also carrying a firearm. Multiple shoppers were nearby, including a mother and child directly in between the two armed men. [. . .] When recovered, both Bradford's firearm and Brown's firearm were loaded with a live round in the chamber. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that both men presented an immediate deadly threat to innocent civilians and first responders inside the Galleria.³¹






The attorney general cannot seem to resist driving home the idea that, even though it was ancillary to his argument about the reasonableness of the shooting, Bradford was dangerous simply because he was a Black man with a gun. It is legal in Alabama to carry a weapon with a round chambered, and, in fact, most people who carry concealed weapons do so with a live round in the chamber so as to be prepared to use their gun quickly, if they deem it necessary.³² Additionally, there is no indication that Bradford would have shot at Brown as he fled, nor that he would have put anyone's life in danger. The report positions Bradford as criminal, even as it absolves Officer 1, the one who actually shot at Bradford in the direction of the "mother and child directly in between the two armed men."

E. J. Bradford is just one of the most recent examples of law-abiding Black citizens who should embody "good guys" with guns who are nevertheless killed by police. On November 11, 2018, Jemel Roberson, a security guard at a bar outside of Chicago, stopped an active shooter by subduing the attacker at gunpoint. When police arrived, an officer shot and killed Roberson as he held the suspect to the ground. In video footage of the moments following the shooting, Roberson's fellow security guard shouts, "your man shot my man! The police shot security. [. . .] Do you not see us with vests on?"³³ In one of the highest-profile cases, Philando Castile was killed by a police officer during a traffic stop on July 6, 2016. When the officer approached Castile's window, Castile informed him that he was carrying a licensed firearm in the car. Within forty seconds of initiating the conversation, officer Jeronimo Yanez shot Castile through the window of his car. In all three of these cases, police emphasized the reasonableness of their actions based on the performance of the victims: Roberson allegedly didn't follow "verbal commands"; Castile allegedly was told to "get his fucking hand off his gun."³⁴ As with Bradford, police later retracted or revised these statements, and witnesses contradicted police claims.³⁵ It was too late, though. During the encounters, police officers (mis)cast the innocent victims as "actors/suspects," and thus were granted nearly unimpeded recourse to deadly force.³⁶ Charlton Heston assured viewers that "any gun in the hands of a decent person is no threat to anyone—except bad people." This view of guns as mere tools meant to carry out the will of their wielders has shaped gun culture ever since, but it necessitates a certain amount of role-playing. When the Alabama attorney general's office absolved the officer who shot Bradford of any wrongdoing, they cast the officer in the role of the *decent* person, and cast E. J. Bradford in the other role—that of the *bad* person. Understanding how performance structures the iterations of racism inherent in deadly police encounters disentangles the mythology behind, and the danger in, the tagline of a "good guy with a gun." Ultimately, it is not just a question of how "good" is defined in these encounters and who bears the brunt of being marked as "bad," but who is deserving of the right to live within a pervasive gun culture.

Notes

1. For a historical analysis of “do-it-yourself” armed self-defense in the United States, see Caroline Light, *Stand Your Ground: A History of America’s Love Affair With Do-It-Yourself-Defense* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). 
2. Bradford was separated from the Army at the time of the shooting; he had completed basic training (which includes extensive training in gun handling and marksmanship) but was “administratively separated” from the Army before he completed “advanced individual training,” which would have prepared him for a vocational role. Jon Anderson, “Armed Man Killed by Hoover Police at Riverchase Galleria was Military Man,” *Hoover Sun*, November 23, 2018, <https://hooversun.com/news/hoover-police-see-videos-from-deadly-thanksgiving-night-sho/> < <https://hooversun.com/news/hoover-police-see-videos-from-deadly-thanksgiving-night-sho/> > . 
3. Khushbu Shah, “EJ Bradford Was Shot Three Times from Behind by Officer, Autopsy Reveals,” *Guardian*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/03/ej-bradford-alabama-police-mall-shooting-autopsy> < <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/03/ej-bradford-alabama-police-mall-shooting-autopsy> > . Surveillance video released at the same time as the Alabama attorney general’s report of the shooting affirms the claim that Bradford was running away from officers when he was shot. “Surveillance Video of Shooting at Riverchase Galleria (Nov. 22, 2018),” YouTube, February 5, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6obgz3yHOg&feature=youtu.be> < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6obgz3yHOg&feature=youtu.be> > . 
4. Shah, “EJ Bradford.” 
5. Recent newspaper articles, podcasts, and editorials have examined hypocritical public and legal responses to Black gun owners who use their guns in self-defense. Some examples include Jamil Smith, “The ‘Good Guy With a Gun’ Is Never Black,” *Rolling Stone*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/good-guy-with-gun-760557/> < <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/good-guy-with-gun-760557/> > ; Cedric L. Alexander, “Recent Police Shootings Upend NRA’s ‘Good Guy With a Gun’ Theory,” *CNN*, December 1, 2018; “They Were Good Guys With Guns,” editorial, *Washington Post*, December 1, 2018, A16. 
6. Office of the Attorney General of the State of Alabama, “Attorney General’s Report Regarding the Officer-Involved Shooting Death of Emantic (“E.J.”) Bradford, Jr. at the Riverchase Galleria on November 22, 2018,” February 5, 2019, <https://ago.alabama.gov/Documents/news/Hoover/Report.pdf> < <https://ago.alabama.gov/Documents/news/Hoover/Report.pdf> > , 1. Hereafter, “AG Report.” 
7. AG Report, 24. 
8. AG Report, 4. 
9. “Does the ‘Good Guy With a Gun’ Tagline Work If That Guy is Black?,” January 2, 2019, in 1A, podcast, MP3 audio, 30:24, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/02/681744978/does-the-good-guy-with-a-gun-tagline-work-if-that-guy-is-black> < <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/02/681744978/does-the-good-guy-with-a-gun-tagline-work-if-that-guy-is-black> > . 
10. In 2017, there were an estimated 393 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States, by far the highest rate of civilian-owned guns of any country, and more than the combined number of civilian-owned guns held in the next twenty-four in the top twenty-five gun-owning countries. Aaron Karp, “Briefing Paper: Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers,” *Small Arms Survey*, June 2018, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf> < <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf> > , 4. 
11. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2018. 

12. Black men are the most likely group of Americans to die by firearm homicide, and their rate of death is highest in states where disparities between Black and white Americans are the highest. In "Comparison of Rates of Firearm and Nonfirearm Homicide and suicide in Black and White Non-Hispanic Men, by U.S. State," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 168 (April 2018): 712-720. Black Americans are killed by police at a rate of 7.2 per million; for comparison, white Americans are killed at a rate of 2.9 per million. Native Americans are the most likely to be killed by police, at a rate of 7.8 per million. In Anthony L. Bui, Matthew M. Coates, Ellicott C. Matthay, "Years of Life Lost Due to Encounters With Law Enforcement in the USA, 2015-2016," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 72, no. 8 (2018): 715-718. 
13. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 20, 21. 
14. Charlton Heston, interview by Tim Russert, NBC, *Meet the Press*, May 18, 1997. 
15. "NRA: Full Statement by Wayne LaPierre in Response to Newtown Shootings," *Guardian*, December 21, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/21/nra-full-statement-lapierre-newtown> < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/21/nra-full-statement-lapierre-newtown>> . 
16. "NRA 'Good Guy With A Gun' T-Shirt," NRA Store, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.nrastore.com/nra-good-guy-with-a-gun-t-shirt> < <https://www.nrastore.com/nra-good-guy-with-a-gun-t-shirt>> . 
17. "A Good Guy/Gal With a Gun" Facebook Group, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/concealedcarrywins/> < <https://www.facebook.com/concealedcarrywins/>> . 
18. For a slightly different critique of the totalizing rhetoric of "implicit bias," see Jonathan Kahn, *Race on the Brain: What Implicit Bias Gets Wrong About the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). 
19. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York, Routledge, 2013), 28. 
20. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 34-35. 
21. AG Report, 24, 19. 
22. *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 396 (1989). Rehnquist cites *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 559 (1979). 
23. Works like Khalil Gibran Muhammad's *The Condemnation of Blackness* demonstrate how ostensibly neutral metrics such as statistics were used historically to criminalize Black Americans. The reasonableness standard likewise appears neutral, but allows prejudices and racialized thinking to proliferate and justify overly violent policing. Khalil Gibran Muhammed, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). 
24. AG Report, 12. 
25. "Active Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training," <https://alerrt.org/> < <https://alerrt.org/>> , accessed February 6, 2019. 
26. AG Report, 21. 
27. AG Report, 21. 
28. AG Report, 21. 
29. AG Report, 21. 
30. AG Report, 22. 
31. AG Report, 23-24. 

32. Bradford held a concealed carry permit from the state of Alabama; it is completely legal for permit holders to carry a fully loaded weapon with a round chambered and ready to fire. "Alabama Man 'Brandished Gun' Before Officer Shot Him Dead, Police Say," *Guardian*, November 26, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/nov/26/alabama-emantic-ej-bradford-shooting-police> < <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/nov/26/alabama-emantic-ej-bradford-shooting-police> > ; "Alabama Concealed Carry Reciprocity Map and Gun Laws," U.S. Concealed Carry Association, https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/resources/ccw_reciprocity_map/al-gun-laws/ < https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/resources/ccw_reciprocity_map/al-gun-laws/ > . There is disagreement among concealed carriers whether it is better to carry with a round chambered or unchambered. Those who contend that concealed guns ought to be carried loaded, but without a round chambered, fall back on safety; it is impossible for a gun to accidentally fire an unchambered bullet. Those who claim that concealed guns ought to be carried fully loaded and with a round chambered argue that the implicit demand of concealed carry is that the gun owner be ready for an active shooting situation at all times and therefore should not plan on being able to take time to chamber a round. Well-respected gun instructors fall on both sides of the argument. The Alabama attorney general suggesting that it is suspect for Bradford's gun to be "loaded with a live round in the chamber" is anathema to a huge amount of concealed carry theory and training. It also obscures two other fundamental issues: 1) Bradford may have chambered the round in response to the active shooting in which he was engaged, thus perfectly enacting even the safest version of concealed carry training; and 2) the officer had no way of knowing that Bradford's gun was loaded with a live round in the chamber, and thus cannot suggest that such knowledge contributed to their decision to shoot Bradford. 
33. P. R. Lockhart, "A Black Security Guard Caught a Shooting Suspect—Only to be Shot By Police Minutes Later," *Vox*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/11/12/18088874/jemel-roberson-police-shooting-illinois-ian-covey-video>. 
34. Matthew Walberg and Zak Koeske, "Witness to Shooting of Security Guard Jemel Roberson: Officer Opened Fire 'Not Even 5 Seconds' After Warning," *Chicago Tribune*, November 16, 2018, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/news/ct-met-jemel-roberson-security-guard-shooting-witness-20181115-story.html>; Susan Du, "Interviews Contradict Jeronimo Yanez Trial Testimony He Saw Philando Castile's Gun," *City Pages*, June 20, 2017, <http://www.citypages.com/news/interviews-contradict-jeronimo-yanez-trial-testimony-he-saw-philando-castiles-gun/429733013>. 
35. Walberg and Koeske, "Witness"; Du, "Interviews." 
36. Jeronimo Yanez, the officer who shot and killed Philando Castile, was acquitted of three felony charges in 2017. Mitch Smith, "Minnesota Officer Acquitted in Killing of Philando Castile," *New York Times*, June 16, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/police-shooting-trial-philando-castile.html> < <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/police-shooting-trial-philando-castile.html> > . Ian Covey, the officer who shot and killed Jemel Roberson, has not been charged with a crime and is still an officer with the Midlothian Police Department, pending an investigation of the shooting. Jeffery C. Mays, "Officer Who Fatally Shot Black Security Guard Outside a Bar Is Identified," *New York Times*, January 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/19/us/jemel-roberson-officer-ian-covey.html> < <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/19/us/jemel-roberson-officer-ian-covey.html> > . 

Author Information

Lindsay Livingston

Lindsay Livingston is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Theater and Dance at Bowdoin College. Livingston's work investigates the

intersections between performance, race, violence, and public space. Her current book project, *Extraordinary Violence: Performance, Race, and Gun Culture in the United States*, argues that gun culture in the United States is reflective of and conditioned by racialized performances of citizenship and public inclusion, both onstage and in everyday life.

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The Self-Defeating Notion of the Sovereign Subject in US Gun Culture

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ABSTRACT The politicization of U.S. gun culture since the 1970s has popularized the idea that individual freedom and security is dependent upon the reclamation of traditionally defined sovereign powers. In this article, I outline how the exercise of popular sovereignty is a social relation of rule often involving extra-legal forms of violence, which regularizes unequal levels of vulnerability and security among various groups. I then address how the so-called sovereign subject, thought to be at the root of popular sovereignty, is conceptually contradictory and practically self-defeating. In practice, attempts to return to a supposed pre-political condition of personal sovereignty in order to secure individual freedom involves dismantling the very social conditions that enable such freedom in the first place.

KEYWORDS Frederick Douglass, popular sovereignty, racism, sovereignty, subjectivity, United States, violence

Frederick Douglass described the notion of a sovereign subject as a “contradiction in terms” and an absurdity. “When sovereignty becomes subject,” he argued, “it ceases to be sovereignty.”¹ Hannah Arendt came to a similar conclusion a century later, claiming that the idea of a sovereign subject is not only absurd, but attempts to enact it are prone to violence. For this kind of subject, she argued, freedom can be “purchased only at the price of the freedom, i.e. the sovereignty, of all others.”² This was certainly true of the sovereignty Douglass subjected to critique, namely, the popular sovereignty championed by White slaveholders, who conceived of their freedom as the logical entailment of Black subjugation.

Douglass’s and Arendt’s critiques provide useful insights into notions of freedom and security popular within US gun culture, i.e. freedom as radical independence and personal security as the elimination of vulnerability.³ With the politicization of US gun culture since the 1970s, it has become commonplace to view individual freedom and security as dependent upon or even synonymous with the reclamation of traditionally defined sovereign powers, including the power over life and death (*vitae necisque potestas*).⁴ Today, individual and popular sovereignty are increasingly invoked as justifications for armed vigilantism, reminding us of some of the darkest periods in US history, when extra-legal violence was regularly employed to sustain the private tyranny of racialized rule.⁵

I have divided my discussion into two parts. In the first, I outline the ways in which the exercise of popular sovereignty is a social relation of rule that often involves extra-legal forms of violence. These practical forms of rule regularize unequal levels of vulnerability and security among various groups, which in turn enable juridical normalization. In the second part, I address how the sovereign subject, thought to be at the root of popular sovereignty, is conceptually contradictory and practically self-defeating. Conceptually,

popular sovereignty emerges only at the moment of its alienation, i.e. retroactively, thus making the project of recuperating the sovereign subject an infinitely receding and ultimately unfulfillable promise. In practice, attempts to return to a supposed pre-political condition of personal sovereignty in order to secure individual freedom has involved dismantling precisely the social conditions that enable such freedom in the first place.⁶

Popular Sovereignty and Lawless Violence

Frederick Douglass's critique of the sovereign subject is found in his speech against the Kansas-Nebraska Bill (1854). In that speech, he passionately opposed the bill's empowerment of local Whites to determine whether slavery would be allowed in the Kansas and Nebraska territories. At the time, this decision-making power about slavery had become synonymous with popular sovereignty, despite the public critiques of detractors like Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.⁷ Of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, Douglass wrote, "The sovereign right to make slaves of their fellowmen if they choose is the only sovereignty that the bill secures."⁸ This critique was informed by a deep commitment to what Douglass took to be true popular sovereignty, namely, the "right of the people to establish a government for themselves," and it had two parts.⁹ First, Douglass rejected the association of popular sovereignty with White rule and slavery, for it excluded Black participation in the sovereignty of "the people." Second, he thought the White supremacist interpretation of popular sovereignty relied on a conceptual contradiction, namely, the sovereign subject. I take up Douglass's conceptual argument and its contemporary relevance in the next section.

Portrait of Frederick Douglass, circa 1847. Unidentified photographer.

Douglass's critique of the association of popular sovereignty with slavery begins with a consideration of law and, in particular, his claim that there has never been a state or federal law that established slavery in the United States. There existed innumerable legal regulations, of course, but the institution itself was never legally established. "It is now, and always has been," he says, "a system of lawless violence."¹⁰ This encourages us to, as Orlando Patterson later advocated, consider slavery as a "relation of domination rather than as a category of legal thought," and thus to inquire how sovereignty manifests in

relations of rule beyond the law.¹¹ In support of his claim, Douglass alluded to a statement by James Murray Mason, the Virginia Senator and author of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. When a critic of Mason's bill proposed an amendment requiring, upon capture, evidence of the legality of slavery in the state from which the enslaved person escaped, Mason was left without a defense. He replied that "no such proof can be produced," for he was "not aware that there is a single State in which the institution is established by positive law." Moreover, he added, "no such law was necessary for its establishment."¹²

Mason was relying on an assumption that White rule was simply a fact of the social order, prior to any legal categorization or regulation. Although Mason sought to naturalize White rule, it was of course the result of sustained coercion and brutality. The creation of the practical conditions to which a juridical norm can later be applied, is an example of what Carl Schmitt called the "absolute form" of exception that characterizes sovereign power.¹³ We could interpret the "system of lawless violence" Douglass referred to as such an absolute form of exception, regularizing social relations and thus engendering the iterability necessary for legal norms to take hold. One is reminded here of the South Carolina Regulators of the 1760s, whose "lawless methods," wrote historian Richard Maxwell Brown, "had achieved their end, paradoxically, in the establishment of law and order."¹⁴

One type of regularity produced by these extra-legal forms of racialized rule is increased precarity and vulnerability to violence on the part of those subject to domination. The historian J. M. Opal describes the need of Whites in antebellum America to "find sovereignty where the law did not reach" and this "promise of greater sovereignty" was "directly tied to the enhanced misery of black and native peoples."¹⁵

Their enhanced sovereignty required both the degradation of others and a certain kind of chaos in the nation at large: the daily freedoms for some to go armed, to seize lands, to vote, to take offense, and to threaten; the daily demands on others to retire, to hide, to bear quietly, and to forgive.¹⁶

Mason's Fugitive Slave Act is an instance of this phenomenon insofar as it magnified the already disproportionate epistemic authority of Whites, particularly of White men.¹⁷ By legally recognizing the claim of a White person to any Black person as their fugitive property, without documentation, the Fugitive Slave Act formalized the epistemic authority of Whites to render Black communities vulnerable to arbitrary violence. "Each and all of us [has been] reduced to the mercy or discretion of any white man in the country," wrote Martin R. Delany, Douglass's coeditor at the *North Star* newspaper.¹⁸

A poster dated April 24, 1851, warning the people of
Boston to beware of authorities acting as slave
catchers.

The pursuit of White sovereignty as social domination beyond the law also manifested in a variety of exclusionary economic practices, private militias, and vigilante patrols.¹⁹ After the Civil War, unofficial police forces were created to enforce economic benefits for Whites, while communities of color were routinely subject to intimidation and violence by organized gun clubs and voluntary militias, sometimes referred to as “mutual aid clubs.”²⁰ These White vigilante groups, including most famously the Ku Klux Klan, were explicitly dedicated to suppressing Black freedom, disarming Black groups, and in general producing a condition of increased Black vulnerability.²¹

The experience of vulnerability is inseparable from the social conditions that enable our freedom and security. We are all fundamentally vulnerable insofar as our identities are constituted through relations of social recognition beyond our individual control and those identities are physically embodied, hence exposing us to potential harm. However, groups experience vulnerability unequally, because the level of risk to which we are exposed depends in part on our social location within relations of rule.

Despite the indelible human condition of vulnerability, the *desire* of the sovereign subject is to assert complete control over these forms of exposure, to withdraw from social interdependencies that render it vulnerable, and to vigilantly police the newly drawn boundaries of a radically independent self. “The sovereign subject,” writes Judith Butler, “poses as precisely not the one who is impinged upon by others, precisely not the one

whose permanent and irreversible injurability forms the condition and horizon of its actions."²² This task of preempting one's own injurability comes at the cost of the other's freedom, for the conditions and possibilities of their actions must be determined by the will of others.

The Sovereign Subject as Contradictory and Self-Defeating

The *myth* of the sovereign subject is that the complete elimination of such vulnerability is possible, that the assertion of this control enables true freedom, and that such freedom existed at one point in the past, namely, before the powers of the sovereign subject were alienated to others. The freedom said to be regained through the reclamation of sovereignty is understood as independence from influence exercised beyond the self-legislative and coercive capacities of the subject. Like the lord in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, who initially and mistakenly sought freedom through the subjection of the other (i.e. the bondsman), the pursuit of this freedom shifts violability and heteronomy to others.²³ "Such a sovereign position," wrote Butler, "not only denies its own constitutive injurability but tries to relocate injurability in the other as an effect of doing injury to that other and exposing that other as, by definition, injurable."²⁴

The desire to become an inviolable subject fuels the disavowal of the social norms and relations that simultaneously make us vulnerable and form "the condition and horizon" of our actions. If we cannot accept the vulnerability associated with the social conditions that enable our action and thus our freedom, and we cannot extract ourselves from them, then the authoritarian impulse to assert one's will over these conditions—including the wills of others—soon presents itself. The attempt to achieve inviolability through detachment thus turns into the construction of a private form of rule performed upon and through the bodies of others. Whether or not such rule becomes legally recognized, it represents the substitution of one form of mutual dependency, which is relatively stable and mutually enabling, with another, more destabilizing and coercive kind.

Douglass's conceptual critique of this purported sovereign subject is informed by the seemingly paradoxical nature of popular sovereignty itself, namely, that sovereignty emerges at the moment of its alienation from the people. "When what was future becomes the present," writes Douglass, "it ceases to be the future and so with sovereignty and subjection, they cannot exist at the same time in the same place, any more than an event can be future and present at the same time."²⁵ The subjects in whom sovereignty originates cannot simultaneously possess sovereign power, for this power only arises *after* the collective act of consent. In other words, the constituent power of the people to create sovereignty, i.e. to authorize the rule of others, is not itself sovereign power. "The people are a sovereign which cannot exercise sovereignty," wrote Joseph de Maistre.²⁶

To clarify the distinct moments of this relation, it is helpful to distinguish the power to constitute from the power to command, not unlike the way Cicero distinguished the power of the people (*potestas in populo*) from the authority (*auctoritas*) of the Senate.²⁷ This does not, however, completely capture the logic at work here. Jacques Derrida has, for example, demonstrated how a unidirectional understanding of the present and future, like the one Douglass holds, fails to comprehend the multidirectional nature of this constituent power: It produces both the sovereign and, retroactively, *the people*. In the signing the US Declaration of Independence, for example, the people also constitutes itself as a subject capable of such authorization. The people, wrote Derrida, "does *not* exist, *before* this declaration, not *as such*. If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer."²⁸

The fundamental conceptual problem with the sovereign subject is, according to Douglass's critique (with a Derridean addendum), that it fails to recognize sovereignty and subject as emergent properties and thus falls prey to the fallacy of division. It tends to view political sovereignty as the aggregate of individual sovereign powers, like Abraham Bosse's famous seventeenth-century frontispiece for Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* in which the body of the sovereign is composed of a multitude of individuals. From this perspective, political sovereignty is merely an aggregation and thus disaggregation would result in a multitude of sovereign subjects. The Executive Director of Gun Owners of America, Larry Pratt, recently put it this way: "the way for Americans to regain the sovereignty that has slipped unconstitutionally into the hands of our rulers, is for Americans to once again carry guns."²⁹ Sovereignty could then be exercised immediately as self-rule, often viewed as true freedom, rather than mediated through a collective fiction—"the people"—that unequally distributes command and subjection.

Members of a far-right militia group, The Three Percenters, stand guard in Market Street Park at the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Photo credit: Anthony Crider.

Douglass rightly called this notion of sovereignty an absurdity and although there is a long American tradition of conflating sovereignty and freedom, not distinguishing them is perilous. Arendt argues that the association of freedom and sovereignty is "the most pernicious and dangerous consequence" of the long and problematic identification of political freedom and free will.³⁰ Freedom as free will is divorced from acting in the world with others and becomes fully internalized, immaterial.³¹ Freedom as sovereignty is only achievable through the subjection of others, for sovereignty is the power of command, the power to make and enforce laws "without any dictation or interference from any quarter," as Douglass described it.³² "If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same," Arendt concludes, "then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality."³³ Rather than reclaim freedom, the pursuits of the sovereign subject result in the active denial of freedom and security for others and, in a self-defeating turn, for itself as well.

Conclusion

The more passionately one identifies with an abstract notion of freedom, such as free will, the less likely one is to be socialized through mutually recognized norms that enable relations of trust and practices of social cooperation. The dilemma of the sovereign




subject is that an armed retreat into the self in pursuit of sovereignty undermines these social conditions of freedom. Indeed, Arendt goes so far as to claim: "If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce."³⁴ Moreover, the attempt to shore up the boundaries of the self to ensure non-interference produces a highly agitated and vigilant disposition that is perpetually suspicious of others. Enemies abound when shared norms are rejected as unwelcome constraints, and the boundaries of the political community extend no further than one's silhouette. Sovereign power, wrote Alexander Hamilton, brings with it "an impatience of control that disposes those who are invested with the exercise of it to look with an evil eye upon all external attempts to restrain or direct its operations."³⁵ Although sovereign citizens are the most extreme example of this unending self-defensive posture, the insatiable desire for "absolute protection" can be found throughout contemporary gun culture, from Stand Your Ground to, most significantly, the landmark case *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008), which for the first time interpreted the Second Amendment as guaranteeing an individual's right to possess a firearm for self-defense.³⁶

President Donald J. Trump addresses the National Rifle Association annual convention in Indianapolis, Indiana on April 26, 2019, Official White House Photo by Tia Dufour.

It is hardly surprising that Richard Hofstadter, who famously penned an account of the paranoid style of American politics, was an early and astute observer of the NRA's resistance to gun control legislation. In 1970, Hofstadter ended his *American Heritage* article titled "America as a Gun Culture" with a question: "One must wonder how grave a domestic gun catastrophe would have to be in order to persuade us [to accept regulation]. How far must things go?"³⁷ Approximately fifty years later, we can answer with confidence that no gun catastrophe, no matter how grave, could ever weaken the resolve of aspiring sovereign subjects to possess such means of coercion. Indeed, the most spectacularly






















violent and devastating consequences of its own commitments appear only as evidence of the necessity of the sovereign subject's goal, which is neither physical safety nor political freedom, but the protection of extra-legal forms of rule that render the lives of others more precarious.³⁸ If, however, intimidation, coercion, and private tyranny are what result from the actions of the sovereign subject, resistance to them is justifiable in the defense of freedom, and not only, as is most common, for reasons of public health or personal safety. It might then be productive to rephrase Hofstadter's question from a half century ago: Since the threat to freedom posed by the sovereign subject of US gun culture is so grave, how far should a countermovement be willing to go to stop it?

Notes

1. Frederick Douglass, "The Kansas-Nebraska Bill speech, November, 1854," in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Volume II, Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850–1860*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 330. 
2. Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 164. 
3. According to a recent study, three-quarters of all gun owners—of whom the largest demographic is White men—believe their right to own firearms is essential to their personal freedom. Half of all gun owners believe firearms are important to their identity. Pew Research Center, "America's Complex Relationship With Guns," June 2017, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/06/22/americas-complex-relationship-with-guns/> < <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/06/22/americas-complex-relationship-with-guns/>> . The NRA Executive Vice President, Wayne LaPierre, spoke to the increased saliency of absolute security in his famous "good guy with a gun" speech: "The only way to stop a monster from killing our kids, is to be personally involved and invested in a plan of absolute protection." "Transcript: Statement by National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre, Dec. 21, 2012," MassLive, last updated March 24, 2019, https://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2012/12/transcript_statement_by_nation.html < https://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2012/12/transcript_statement_by_nation.html> . 
4. In *Harvest of Rage*, Joel Dyer observes that "anti-government behavior in Rural America," by which he meant the Posse Comitatus, Christian Identity adherents, and right-wing militias of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, "is becoming increasingly tied to the idea of the sovereignty of the individual." Joel Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Only the Beginning* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 174. The growing sovereign citizens movement today, which continues this tradition, seeks to reclaim so-called natural sovereignty by renouncing their legal personality and (often violently) resisting law enforcement or engaging in terrorism. Many so-called sovereign citizens retain the anti-Semitic and racist beliefs of the movement's Posse Comitatus and Christian Identity origins, while their ideas about individual sovereignty have influenced the Oklahoma City bombers, the armed standoff at Cliven Bundy's ranch in Nevada in 2014, the armed standoff led by Cliven Bundy's sons, Ammon and Ryan, at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon in 2016, as well as contemporary militias such as the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters. On the Posse Comitatus, see also Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002) and James Coates, *Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 104–122. For the influence of the sovereign citizen movement on the Bundys, see J.J. MacNab, "Context Matters: The Cliven Bundy Standoff," Parts 1–3," *Forbes*, April 30, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jjmacnab/2014/04/30/context-matters-the-cliven-bundy-standoff-part-1> < <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jjmacnab/2014/04/30/context-matters-the-cliven-bundy-standoff-part-1>> . The association of firearms and individual sovereignty has made its way into NRA talking points and more mainstream media as well. In the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, Andrew P. Napolitano claimed the "right of the people to keep and bear arms is . . . a hallmark of personal sovereignty," and Dan Baum wrote in *Harper's Magazine* that firearms are "the ultimate emblem of individual sovereignty." Andrew P. Napolitano, "The Right to Shoot Tyrants, Not Deer," *Washington Times*, January 10, 2013, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jan/10/the-right-to-shoot-tyrants-not-deer/> <

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jan/10/the-right-to-shoot-tyrants-not-deer/>> , and Dan Baum, "On Gun Control and the Great American Debate Over Individualism," *Harper's Magazine*, May 17, 2013, <https://harpers.org/blog/2013/05/on-gun-control-and-the-great-american-debate-over-individualism> < <https://harpers.org/blog/2013/05/on-gun-control-and-the-great-american-debate-over-individualism> > . Perhaps the most explicit incorporation of these associations into theology can be found in the Rod of Iron Ministry, also known as the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary, founded by pastor Hyung Jin Moon, the son of Rev. Sun Myung Moon. Pastor Moon has made individual sovereignty—represented by crowns of bullets and the carrying of AR-15s (a.k.a. the "rod of iron")—central to the Rod of Iron Ministry's theology and ceremonies. A *Washington Post Magazine* story by Tom Dunkel reports Pastor Moon exclaiming "Look at all these crowns of sovereignty!" at the sight of his congregation. "One tenet of the Sanctuary Church," Dunkel writes, "is that all people are independent kings and queens in God's Kingdom—a kind of don't-tread-on-me notion of personal sovereignty." Tom Dunkel, "Locked and Loaded for the Lord," *Washington Post Magazine*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/05/21/feature/two-sons-of-rev-moon-have-split-from-his-church-and-their-followers-are-armed/> < <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/05/21/feature/two-sons-of-rev-moon-have-split-from-his-church-and-their-followers-are-armed/> > . See also Southern Poverty Law Center, "Anti-LGBT Cult Leader Calls on Followers to Purchase Assault Rifles," February 9, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/02/09/anti-lgbt-cult-leader-calls-followers-purchase-assault-rifles> < <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/02/09/anti-lgbt-cult-leader-calls-followers-purchase-assault-rifles> > .

5. "The principle of vigilantism," writes Richard Slotkin, "is the assertion of a privilege of extralegal violence in a social setting where some form of law already exists." Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 136.
6. For a Foucauldian reading of the sovereign subject as armed citizen, see Jennifer Carlson, "States, Subjects and Sovereign Power: Lessons from Global Gun Cultures," *Theoretical Criminology* 18, no. 3 (2013): 335–353. Carlson's account of why sovereignty has "exceeded the confines of the state" focuses, however, solely on the state's inability to satisfactorily address high crime rates (345). For excellent analyses of the role gendered experiences of vulnerability play in motivating concealed carry, see Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015) and Caroline Light, *Stand Your Ground: A History of America's Love Affair with Lethal Self-Defense* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017).
7. Abraham Lincoln publicly ridiculed the author of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, Lincoln Stephen A. Douglas, for thinking that he "discovered that the right of the white man to breed and flog niggers in Nebraska was popular sovereignty!" Abraham Lincoln, "Portion of a Speech at Edwardsville, Illinois," in *Abraham Lincoln: Political Writings and Speeches*, ed. Terence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 66. For an insightful history of the meaning of popular sovereignty in the United States, see Daniel T. Rodgers, "The People," in *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 80–111.
8. Douglass, "The Kansas-Nebraska Bill," 330–31.
9. Douglass, "The Kansas-Nebraska Bill," 329.
10. Douglass, "The Kansas-Nebraska Bill," 326.
11. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 334.
12. *Washington Union and Intelligencer*, August 19, 1850, cited in Douglass, "The Kansas-Nebraska Bill speech, November, 1854," 326–327. See also William Goodell, "Different Views of the Constitution and of the Legality of Slavery," in *Slavery and Anti-Slavery; A History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres; With a View of the Slavery Question in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: William Goodell, 1855), 563–582.
13. "The exception appears in its absolute form when a situation in which legal prescriptions can be valid must first be brought about." Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the*

- Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13. 
14. Richard Maxwell Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators: The Story of the First American Vigilante Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 111. 
 15. J. M. Opal, *Avenging the People: Andrew Jackson, the Rule of Law, and the American Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 225. 
 16. Opal, *Avenging the People*, 225. 
 17. For an analysis of the specifically patriarchal relations of “the sovereign subject (*sujet souverain*),” see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2010). For compelling arguments that sovereignty is itself masculinist, see Bonnie Mann, *Sovereignty Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). 
 18. Martin R. Delany, “Detroit, Michigan, July 14, 1848,” in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 114–115. 
 19. See Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 203–220. See also Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). 
 20. Hadden, *Slave Patrols*, 206. 
 21. “The idea of the ‘sovereignty of the people,’” writes historian Richard Maxwell Brown, gives “an ideological and philosophical justification and an awesome dignity to the brutal physical abuse or killing of men.” Richard M. Brown, *Strains of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 56. 
 22. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), 178. 
 23. As Simone de Beauvoir writes, “each consciousness seeks to posit itself alone as sovereign subject. Each one tries to accomplish itself by reducing the other to slavery.” Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 52. 
 24. Butler, *Frames of War*, 178. 
 25. Douglass, “The Kansas-Nebraska Bill,” 330. 
 26. Joseph de Maistre, *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty, Religion and Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 93. 
 27. Marcus Tullius Cicero, “On the Laws,” in *On the Commonwealth and On the Laws*, ed. James E. G. Zetzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 168. 
 28. Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, 2002), 49. See also Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988) and Rodgers, “The People.” 
 29. Larry Pratt, “Transfer of Wealth,” *News with Views*, March 15, 2007, <https://www.newswithviews.com/Pratt/larry76.htm> <
<https://www.newswithviews.com/Pratt/larry76.htm>> . 
 30. Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 164. 
 31. The ideal of freedom, writes Arendt, “became sovereignty, the ideal of a free will, independent from others and eventually prevailing against them.” Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 163. 
 32. Douglass, “The Kansas-Nebraska Bill,” 330. 
 33. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 234. 

34. Arendt, "What is Freedom?" 165. [↗](#)
35. Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist No. 15," in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 77. [↗](#)
36. See Chad Kautzer, "Self-Defensive Subjectivity: The Diagnosis of a Social Pathology," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 8 (2014): 743–756. [↗](#)
37. Richard Hofstadter, "America as a Gun Culture," *American Heritage* 21, no. 6 (1970), <https://www.americanheritage.com/content/america-gun-culture> < <https://www.americanheritage.com/content/america-gun-culture>> . [↗](#)
38. See Robert Gooding-Williams, "Fugitive Slave Mentality," *New York Times*, March 27, 2012, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/fugitive-slave-mentality/> < <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/fugitive-slave-mentality/>> . [↗](#)
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Author Information

Chad Kautzer

Chad Kautzer is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University. He is the author of *Radical Philosophy: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2015) and co-editor of *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire* (Indiana University Press, 2009)

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The Necropolitics of Liberty: Sovereignty, Fantasy, and United States Gun Culture

by Alex Trimble Young | Gun Culture, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT This article approaches the speculative fiction of the survivalist right as an archive that can illuminate the continuities between the fantasies of necropolitical power that animate the radical right and undergird the sovereignty of the United States. Focusing on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupier LaVoy Finicum's 2015 novel *Only by Blood and Suffering: Regaining Lost Freedom*, this essay argues that such survivalist fiction, in imagining a future civil conflict that enables the reinstatement of Lockean property rights, should be understood as settler colonial rather than anti-statist. In representing the dystopian future in which "public lands" are reopened as a frontier, survivalist novels like Finicum's reaffirm, rather than challenge, the fantasy that produces the constituted power of the United States.

KEYWORDS fiction, gun culture, necropolitics, settler colonialism, sovereignty, speculative fiction, United States

Introduction: The Survivalist Novel and Public Policy

In his 1998 speculative novel *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse*, survivalist-guru-cum-novelist James Wesley, Rawles [*sic*] concludes with a chapter set in a future university classroom. The professor featured in the scene is one of the novel's heroes, a white man and a militia leader who fought in "the Second Civil War" to rid the United States of forces representing globalism and socialism.¹ He is about to start a lesson when he is interrupted by an alarmed female student who is pointing at one of her male peers: "He's got a gun!" she exclaims. "He's carrying a concealed weapon! That's not allowed on campus!" Though the class is a physics lecture, the professor finds a "teachable moment" in the young woman's outburst, and offers his female student a civics and history lesson: "this young gentleman's choice to carry a gun—for whatever reason he chooses—is his own. He is a Sovereign Citizen and *sui juris*. The state has no say in the matter . . . I should also remind you that this is one of the main reasons we spent four horrendous years fighting the Second Civil War."

While the scene is indicative of the pedantic tone of Rawles's novels, it also speaks to the improbable ability of the social movements of the radical right to move the needle on state and federal policy. In 1998, the notion that carrying firearms into university classrooms should be either tolerated or celebrated as a performance of popular sovereignty was nothing but a fantasy of a radical subculture. Twenty years later, it is an increasingly mainstream position within the Republican party, ten states have "campus carry" laws on the books mandating tolerance for the concealed carry of firearms on university

campuses, and the president of the United States is advocating for instructors to carry guns into university and K–12 classrooms.²

The speculative fiction of the paramilitary right provides an archive of novels that, while predictably deplorable as literary objects, offer a productive site for understanding the fantasy of popular sovereignty that shapes gun policy in the United States. While only occasionally noted as oddities by mainstream media critics, these novels play an outsized role in the “alternative public sphere” of the radical right.³ Cheap to produce and disseminate (they are often published in serial form on blogs and websites before the successful ones are self published or published by independent right-wing publishing houses), and offering a space of plausible deniability in which to discuss activities that might otherwise provide grounds for prosecution, novels have been central to building and maintaining many of the ideological communities and the celebrity activist personas connected to the paramilitary right.

In this essay, drawn from a broader project engaging these novels, I argue that this archive and the ideology it espouses deserves more serious scrutiny by those seeking to reduce gun violence in the United States. I focus on one particularly influential survivalist novel, *Only by Blood and Suffering: Regaining Lost Freedom*, written by Lavoy Finicum. Finicum was the once small-time right-wing media figure who gained national fame and became a hero of the gun culture and land transfer movement for his role in the events surrounding the armed seizure of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by Ammon and Ryan Bundy and their supporters in 2016, a role that ended with his eventual death at the hands of FBI agents and the Oregon Highway Patrol at the conclusion of that occupation. I argue that the remarkable transformation of the fiction of Second Amendment advocates like Finicum and Rawles into the realm of policy has been facilitated by the fact that their politics is grounded in a broadly held fantasy about the nature of popular sovereignty in the United States. To be contested, this fantasy must be critiqued as a phenomenon endemic to US political culture rather than dismissed as a radical outlier to that culture. Such a reckoning demands a transhistorical perspective that can understand the ways in which this fantasy is both productive of and maintained by the violence of white settler sovereignty.

Liberal Gun Politics and The Legacy of the Frontier

The impasse of the contemporary gun debate hinges on a disagreement regarding how the control of violence should be reconfigured. The right argues that we need more “good guys with guns,” further distributing necropolitical sovereignty—the ability to determine “who may live and who must die”—throughout the (often implicitly white) populous.⁴ This argument posits that the democratic distribution of necropolitical power is not only a necessity for protecting citizens from crime, but also for protecting citizens from the power of a potentially tyrannical state.

Conservative commitment to this position is illegible without a consideration of the exigencies that shaped United States sovereignty in the first instance. In the lead up to revolution, and in the early years of the republic, settlers demanded the independence to wield necropolitical power over the Indigenous populations they conquered and the Black populations they enslaved when and where they chose, even as they looked to the military power of the imperial state to aid them in that effort. This fundamental ambivalence

regarding the relationship between private and state violence produced by these circumstances was enshrined in our political culture as the Second Amendment, and continues to inform narratives of popular sovereignty across the political spectrum.⁵

Liberal responses to this argument face a conundrum, in that they work to reframe gun violence in the present as a biopolitical emergency (casting gun violence as a public health crisis) without challenging the legitimacy of the historical violence that once justified the widespread private ownership of firearms. They accomplish this feat by imagining an historical break that distinguishes the legitimate violence of the frontier from illegitimate gun violence in the present. Legal scholar Charles W. Collier's 2014 *Critical Inquiry* article "The Death of Gun Control: An American Tragedy" offers a good example of how this narrative tends to be articulated. The United States, this argument claims, was once a colony and then a frontier nation in which the private ownership of guns played a meaningful role securing the self-defense of citizens and providing a bulwark against tyranny, but that time has passed. While this argument is bolstered by undeniable facts about the present, it also relies on the affirmation of a mythic past in which—as Collier claims via an unqualified citation of Frederick Jackson Turner—"the frontier is productive of individualism."⁶ Like Turner, Collier relies on elision of the anti-Indigenous violence that enabled frontier expansion in order to affirm that the frontier was once productive of democratic values, as the curious verb constructions in the following passage make clear:

I think the cultural heritage of the frontier is in . . . a precarious position. The "rugged individualism" of the frontier—transposed into modern conditions in the form of gun violence—has come to threaten its own cultural heritage. With every new convulsion of death and destruction, the cultural conversation casts that individualist paradigm in an ever dimmer light, making its original virtues harder to discern. The little house on the prairie *has become* a major crime scene.⁷

The Laura Ingalls Wilder novel referenced in the final sentence is the story of the armed occupation of Osage lands, illegal even under US law when it occurred.⁸ "The Little House on the Prairie" was a major crime scene. A commitment to the "cultural heritage" of the frontier, and the political imaginary it produced, makes the acknowledgement of this fact impossible.

The course of action implicitly offered by Collier in his attempt to decry gun violence while upholding the "cultural heritage" of the frontier is predictably "precarious." The imposition of a more totalizing state monopoly of violence is difficult, as legal scholar Sanford Levinson famously argued, to square with other political beliefs about protecting individual freedoms that most liberals hold.⁹ It is certainly inconsistent with recent left-liberal critiques of police violence and of the surveillance state.

The contradictions that emerge in liberal arguments about the Second Amendment are perhaps symptomatic of a broader aporia in the US liberal imagination. Aziz Rana argues that the "symbolic power of the constitution" has been crucial to allowing white Americans to imagine the US as "the quintessential civic polity . . . a liberal society engaged in a process of self fulfillment" while at the same time maintaining their structural position as the beneficiaries of the inequalities produced by racism and colonialism.¹⁰ "This dominant narrative" hinges on a dehistoricizing move whereby, in Rana's words, it "neglects to depict the civic drive—aimed at vesting sovereignty in all people 'regardless of race, colour, creed, gender, language or ethnicity'—as only a relatively recent development. Instead, this account reads such aspirations back into the very founding of the United

States, albeit while accepting the extent to which equality may have been deferred in historical fact.”¹¹ This disavowal of the fundamentally colonial origins of the constitution is an essential rhetorical strategy for “de-emphasizing the need for material restitution and symbolic rupture” required to imagine a genuinely decolonial and anti-racist break with the violent foundations of US sovereignty.¹²

In the United States, the notion that the frontier was a site productive of liberal values is not merely a conservative or liberal ideological position. It is central to the constitutive fantasy that makes ideology—and that ideology’s undoing—possible. Jacqueline Rose argues that examining the role of fantasy in politics “can help us understand the symptom of statehood, why there is something inside the very process upholding the state as a reality which threatens and exceeds it.”¹³ Rose’s work on fantasy and the state—especially the sense in which it articulates the possibility of a political unconscious that simultaneously produces state subjects and produces a threat to that state’s continued sovereignty—offers an approach to fantasy that allows us to apprehend the right’s claims about the republican values of the gun in ways that both map their contradictions and trace their relationship to the US state itself.

To date, the liberal imagination has taken a rather different tack, attempting to exorcise this fantasy from state politics altogether. Right-wing paramilitary groups like the III%ers militia or the Oath Keepers are defined as “antigovernment group[s]” by the Southern Poverty Law Center.¹⁴ This categorization of such armed groups is not exclusive to the SPLC, but is nearly ubiquitous in public discourse, and was frequently employed in news articles about the Oath Keepers, a paramilitary organization composed of military and police veterans, running ad hoc security for President Trump’s inauguration.¹⁵ The “antigovernment” label establishes a category both distinct from “terrorist”—the category that names organized assertions of necropolitical power among racialized populations—yet supposedly articulated against the state itself. In the Trump era, the label has persisted even as it has become increasingly meaningless. In the last three years, rightwing paramilitary organizations have largely oriented their antagonism away from the federal government and toward the policing of racialized populations and the Left, throwing their capacity for violence behind efforts to patrol the US-Mexico border, seize space on college campuses for hate speech, police Black Lives Matter protests, and defend Trump rallies against counterprotesters.

The aporia dramatized so starkly by paramilitary groups rallying on behalf of the Trump administration being described as “antigovernment” is, like so many of the contradictions of civic life heightened by Trump’s election, not an entirely new one. It was also evident in the reactions to the armed occupation of public lands at Bunkerville, Nevada, and the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge outside of Burns, Oregon by the Bundy family and their allies. These militants undertook their seizure of public land only recently appropriated from Indigenous peoples not in the name of an anti-statist or a revolutionary politics (as Alyosha Goldstein has noted in his work on the Bundy standoffs), but in the spirit of a popular constitutionalism that holds an AR-15 in one hand and an American flag in the other.¹⁶ Militias in the post-Cold War era proudly imagine themselves as the inheritors of the revolutionary violence of the militias at Lexington and Concord, but they are inheritors of a tradition of paramilitary organizing that just as surely has its roots in the slave patrols and colonial militias whose violence was aimed not at the imperial state, but at the racialized other. Settler colonial “pioneers,” whether in the Deadwood camp in the Black Hills or the West Bank, are always tactical in their antagonism toward to state power, flouting the state when it attempts to limit their access to Indigenous resources or

racialized labor, but courting the state's power when they find it necessary to their aims of the conquest of territory and the elimination or policing of racialized populations.¹⁷ The Trump administration's promises to open further Indigenous homelands to extraction and more vigorously police the physical and racial borders of the settler polity are perfectly in line with this political tradition. By portraying the Patriot Movement as revolutionary (or at least potentially revolutionary), both liberal rhetoric representing right-wing paramilitary organizations as anti-government extremists and conservative rhetoric representing them as a bulwark against tyranny obfuscates the settler colonial and anti-black politics that the paramilitary right enacts.

The liberal vision of civic life in the United States depends on a willful forgetting of the foundational violence of settler sovereignty, demanding that right wing militias be understood as antigovernment, even when they appear waving American flags at a Blue Lives Matter rally. It is precisely this act of disavowal that prevents liberals from reading the Patriot movement as what it is: a tradition of popular constitutionalism that embraces rather than obscures the ongoing structures of violence that undergird civic life in the United States.

LaVoy Finicum's Allegory of Counter Sovereignty

LaVoy Finicum poses for a portrait at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters on Jan. 3, 2016.
Photo credit: Brooke Warren.

LaVoy Finicum's novel, *Only By Blood and Suffering*, conforms to the basic genre structures of survivalist fiction. It narrates the journey of a semi-autobiographical protagonist as he (and it's usually a he) flees an urban area after a catastrophic event (in the case of Finicum's novel, the event is the familiar right-wing canard of an electromagnetic pulse attack). He then sets up shop in a rural stronghold where he, his family, and a select group of allies fend off attacks from both the federal government (which has inevitably been compromised by some sort of internationalist conspiracy) and hordes of zombie-like bandits. Along the way, the protagonist is fastidious in his respect for the property rights of others, even as he mows down dozens of people defending his own. Like a surprising number of survivalist novels, Finicum's makes an attempt at something like a "post-racial" perspective. Finicum never overtly racializes the novel's villains, though are obliquely racialized by their descriptions as gang members and escaped prisoners.¹⁸ Unlike the novels of the overtly white supremacist right, such as William Luther Pierce's notorious *Turner Diaries*, Finicum's novel stands as an example of the sort of "color-blind" racism described by Eduardo Bonilla Silva.¹⁹ It concludes, again in conforming to genre type, with the promise of the restoration of a Lockean social contract achieved through the regenerative violence that dominates the novel's plot.²⁰ In the novel's climactic showdown, the villain, a white Homeland Security officer compromised by a vague internationalist conspiracy, declares that "this experiment of a free republic, of people being equal under the law, was a failure."²¹ Finicum's protagonist dedicates himself to restoring the liberal dream of US sovereignty through acts of law-making violence.

The genre of the survivalist novel leans heavily on tropes borrowed from the Western, and Finicum's novel is especially pronounced in this regard. In a paradigmatic liberal Western, the transition from the dynamic violence of the frontier to the peaceful order of the liberal state is evoked in a retrospective narrative that is simultaneously nostalgic and anxious.²² The disavowal of settler colonial violence is paired with an often barely sublimated desire for its return. In the survivalist novel, the law-making violence of the frontier is unapologetically projected into the future as fantasy.

For LaVoy Finicum, the fantasy of sovereign self-sufficiency was deeply aspirational. Jake Bonham, the rancher protagonist of *Only By Blood and Suffering*, is an archetype of the self-sufficient cowboy masculinity that LaVoy Finicum desired, but failed, to embody. In the last years of his life, Finicum lived with his third wife on a ranch outside of Prescott, Arizona. The ranch, by Finicum's own admission, generated no income; the Finicums survived on subsidies earned from parenting four foster children. These children were removed from the Finicum's custody by the state (leaving the Finicums without any substantial means of revenue) when Finicum began to draw national attention for his involvement in the standoff at Malheur.²³

The representations of firearms in *Only By Blood and Suffering* are central to both its aspirational fantasy and pedantic aims. Jake Bonham and his family own an arsenal of weapons that would cost a small fortune to amass, and nearly every gun introduced in the text is glossed in an explanatory footnote. These footnotes are aimed at underscoring Finicum's technological and historical authority and, by extension, the status of the gun as both a tool and a symbol.

Each gun in this arsenal has its task; but when it comes to insurrectionary violence, the AR-15 is the preferred weapon. The footnote on Jake Bonham's Colt AR-15 glosses the usual conservative talking points on the gun's utility and its misconstrual by control advocates:

The AR-15 is the military looking rifle that is currently being targeted by gun control efforts because of its looks and its ability to carry high capacity magazines. It looks like an automatic rifle but is only a semi-automatic. It shoots a .223 caliber bullet typically 55 grains in weight or the military 5.56 millimeter if the barrel is stamped with 5.56.²⁴

The narration then turns to a description of Bonham's preferred ammunition, with a footnote that lovingly describes the "expanding or frangible" qualities of the Honrady V-Max round, "devastating on small game such as coyotes," and far superior to full metal jacket rounds that do not cause "near the tissue damage."²⁵ The gruesome efficacy of these bullets in human tissue becomes an important plot point in the novel's climax.

It is this technological capacity to kill that underwrites what Finicum's narration calls "the immeasurable value that guns now represented" in his imagined dystopia. Against the tyrannical government and implicitly racialized hordes, the gun represents the necropolitical power of the sovereign subject. But the expression of this power requires its own legitimation. *Only by Blood and Suffering*, like so many US narratives, finds this legitimation in a frontier declension narrative. The Bonhams do not fight for a revolutionary future but a frontier past in which "a man used to be sovereign in his own home and his property was his own."²⁶ The Bonhams own a whole range of guns, including Winchester lever actions and a Colt 45, valued primarily not for their lethal efficiency, but for their symbolic connection to the frontier past. In all the novel's pivotal showdowns, Jake Bonham is figured carrying his AR-15, a semiautomatic pistol, and his "great grandfather's Colt revolver strapped to [his] hip. The old ways die hard. . ."²⁷ The Colt revolver is not fired until the plot's denouement, in which Jake, ambushed by three federal agents after successfully defending his ranch from an assault by government forces and conscripted prisoners, solidifies his sovereign claim on his home with his Western quick-draw skills.

Bonham's antiquated sidearm is one of many devices that Finicum deploys to allegorically connect the dystopian future to the nineteenth-century frontier, but it is in his representation of Indigenous peoples that Finicum most tellingly reveals the uncomfortable proximity of the Malheur occupiers' fantasy of popular sovereignty to more familiar fictions that legitimate the constituted power of the United States writ large. Jake Bonham begins the narrative alienated from his white wife, who ends up being killed by a marauding gang in Albuquerque, in part because she doubted her husband's belief that the family should be living in the survivalist compound he had set up at the family ranch. After rescuing his daughter and learning of his wife's death, Jake begins to make the arduous trek back to his ranch and is taken in for a night on the Navajo reservation by a Navajo woman named Sandy Yazzie.²⁸ The collapse of the first name referencing the land and the common Diné surname are significant: like the Indians in Turner's frontier thesis, Sandy represents authentic Indigeneity and also the wilderness itself.²⁹ From this encounter onward, the plot of *Only By Blood and Suffering* intertwines its narrative of popular sovereignty with a white-Indigenous love plot that functions to allegorize not decolonial reconciliation, but rather an attempt at legitimizing settler colonial claims.³⁰

Finicum carries this narrative of settler Indigenization to absurd extremes.³¹ As his relationship with Sandy unfolds, Bonham reveals that he descends from a family of frontier Indian fighters, who also intermarried with the Comanche, and that his great grandfather is buried on his ranch next to the Diné warriors he killed to establish his property claim. Bonham's relationship with Sandy is finally consummated (with a kiss) in an Indigenous cliff dwelling on his ranch. After the novel's climactic battle, Bonham buries one of his

daughters in an Indigenous grave site next to the body of an Indian girl. One could hardly imagine a more direct example of how the Indigenous body comes to serve as the transit whereby white life is rendered grievable.³²

Finicum's over-determined tale of settler indigenization recalls a trend that emerged in the Western genre in the 1920s, another period in US history marked by extreme white anxiety and violence directed toward racialized outsiders. In a study of Westerns created during this period, literary critic William Handley notes a peculiar obsession with representations of cliff dwellings, burial sites, and other ancient forms of Indigenous architecture. Identification with these spaces, Handley argues, represented an attempt by white Americans to "shore up their culture not only by keeping immigrants out but by assuming and absorbing, in an authenticating act of cultural theft, a culture of 'first Americans.'"³³ By identifying with architectures that embodied "a precedent for the destruction of a race and a civilization," settlers legitimated their own genocidal violence and gave voice to anxieties about their own supposed precarity.³⁴ This is precisely the register in which Finicum's embrace of Indigeneity operates.

As a long tradition of Indigenous critique reminds us, the appropriation of Indigenous cultures in the service of settler claims to legitimacy is hardly an exclusive practice of conservatism. By recognizing the uncomfortable proximity of Finicum's fantasy of settler indigenization to similar fantasies articulated by white liberal heroes—Gary Snyder's "white shamanism," or Elizabeth Warren's claims to Cherokee identity offer two obvious examples—we can grasp the root of liberal failures to contest his politics.³⁵ Finicum's sovereign claim, like the sovereign claim of the settler state itself, is articulated in relation to an Indigenous claim that must be repeatedly and anxiously evoked and appropriated.³⁶

Conclusion: Gun Culture and The Land Transfer Movement

In the four years since Finicum died, he has been canonized by an increasingly broad swath of the right, and the political causes he championed have achieved a string of stunning victories. In 2017, the Board of Supervisors of Mohave County Arizona, where Finicum owned his ranch, voted to rename a two mile stretch of highway in his honor. US courts have been largely unsuccessful in multiple attempts to hold his co-conspirators in the Bundy standoffs accountable for their armed seizure of federal lands. The Trump presidency and Republican-controlled Senate have held the line to prevent any meaningful action on gun control in the face of the latest string of horrific mass shootings and enabled the rollback of environmental protections on hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands in the West. In one of the most stark examples of the mainstreaming of Finicum's politics, Trump has installed William Perry Pendley, an outspoken attorney well-known for his aggressive stance against environmental protections and American Indian claims on public lands, as acting head of the Bureau of Land Management. Pendley's Twitter handle is @sagebrush_rebel.³⁷

Finicum's support for the struggle to deregulate federal lands and/or transfer their control to the states or private interests and his absolutist stance on the right to bear arms were intimately linked. The land transfer movement may seem tangential to considerations of the Second Amendment, but connections between the two extend beyond their confluence in the ideology of Finicum and the other militants in the Bundy family's orbit.

The driving force behind the large-scale preservation of public lands in the United States that began during Theodore Roosevelt's administration was not the value of ecological preservation per se, or a respect for the ongoing life of Indigenous nations. For Roosevelt and the cohort of white men who aided him in crafting the myth of the American frontier, public lands were necessary to the preservation of a national character defined by the martial and masculine values they believed in danger of disappearing in the wake of the closing of that frontier. While the conservation of public lands has provided an immeasurable good by preventing the despoliation of some of North America's most vital ecosystems, public lands were intended, and in many ways still function, as an arena for the re-creation of frontier experiences through outdoor recreation. The public lands of the United States are thus plagued by a fundamental contradiction: they are a commons created to memorialize a process of conquest and enclosure. As environmental humanities scholar April Anson has argued, this contradiction has dogged contemporary efforts to protect them as white liberal activists have seized on a rhetoric of ownership that celebrates the historical process of enclosure while attempting to forestall it in the present.³⁸

















Like so much of the contemporary political and juridical discourse surrounding the Second Amendment, then, the discourse about public lands is too often reduced to a debate between competing affirmative visions of frontier conquest. The liberal iteration of this rhetoric celebrates the historic frontier as productive of a egalitarian democratic nation whose rough and ready origins can be affirmed through the practice of outdoor recreation. This alienates the Indigenous and racialized people whose land and labor constituted the frontier's largesse, but it just as surely alienates those among the white population who, having been denied the impossible promise of manifest destiny, take a cue from history and imagine the settler commons not as a space for recreation but an economic frontier that contains their piece of the pie. That men like Finicum are taking up arms to exert their right to extract value from these lands should come as no surprise in a nation that still imagines the frontier as productive of both popular sovereignty and economic autonomy.

On October 24, 2019, the mainstreaming of the survivalist novel and the ideology it represents attained a significant milestone with the nationwide theatrical release of *The Reliant*, a filmic adaptation of Dr. Patrick Johnston's successful novel of the same name.³⁹ Bankrolled by the online fundraising efforts of the author and executive producer Tim Schmidt, CEO of the US Concealed Carry Association, *The Reliant* is the story of a gun-loving family who, in the face of chaos spurred by the collapse of the dollar, take to the woods where their labor and command of violence allows them to live off the land and save themselves.⁴⁰ Like Finicum's novel, it is the story of both a "regeneration through violence" and an affirmation of the autonomy of the Turnerian yeoman achieved on (implicitly) public lands, which are imagined as a future frontier.


Contemporary gun culture in the United States is a phenomenon that requires those who would resist its violence to look to dynamics much older than the Trump administration and broader than the material culture of the gun itself. As Finicum's novel and the politics it enables demonstrate, gun culture is but one expression of a more foundational fantasy. By refusing the "move to innocence" that casts the fantasy of settler sovereignty articulated in survivalist novels like Finicum's as antithetical to normative affirmations of the United States as a frontier nation, we might take one important step toward joining in the work of "material restitution and symbolic rupture" necessary to think our relations otherwise.⁴¹






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Notes

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Author Information

Alex Trimble Young

Alex Trimble Young is an Honors Faculty Fellow in Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. Young is a scholar of transnational settler colonialism and United States literature and culture. His forthcoming book, *The Frontiers of Dissent: The Settler Colonial Imaginary in U.S. Literature after 1945*, focuses on how the oppositional literature in the contemporary U.S. has been shaped by the ongoing history of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance.

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On Civil Rights, Armed Citizens[®], and Historical Overdose

by Caroline Light | Gun Culture, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT Today's radically sovereign Armed Citizen[®]—a commodity fetish trademarked by the NRA—derives his representational and ethical power from fantasies of self-defensive heroism rooted in historical distortions that obscure the traces of armed settler colonialist violence and racial capitalism. Such historical “overdose” flattens anti-racist civil rights activism, making us “complaisant hostages” of a selective memory that serves self-destructive, necropolitical structures today.

KEYWORDS civil rights, gun culture, United States

The National Rifle Association is America's longest-standing civil rights organization.

NRA promotional materials and website¹

People can suffer from historical overdose, complaisant hostages of the pasts they create.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot²

When Mabel Robinson Williams was in her twenties, she lived in Monroe, North Carolina with her husband, Robert, and their two young children. Rural North Carolina in the 1950s was a dangerous place for a young Black family, especially one actively resisting white supremacist violence and the exclusionary structures of Jim Crow. Given the state's refusal to protect civil rights activists from the onslaught of racist backlash, armed “self-reliance” became vital to collective Black survival. In the late 1950s, the Williamses assembled a rifle club comprised of Black community members who used firearms to defy white supremacist violence in its many forms, and they decided to apply for membership in the National Rifle Association (NRA). At the time, the NRA was primarily concerned with promoting firearm training and safety instruction for hunters, and Robert and Mabel believed their group would benefit from the organization's abundant safety and legal information. However, in their application materials, they avoided indicating their group's racial composition. As Mrs. Williams explained in an interview some four decades later, “I'm sure when we joined and the years after then, had [the NRA] known we were a Black group, they would have revoked our charter.”³ When asked why it would have concerned the NRA to know that their group was Black, Williams explained that whites “knew that if a large number of Black people should take up arms that . . . it may lead to a . . . civil war.” Whites had “control of the police department and of the state troopers, the National Guard. And they didn't intend to release that power. And they felt that [Blacks taking up arms] was a threat to the power.”⁴ It was evident to Mabel and Robert Williams that the NRA would not have supported armed Black self-defense in the 1950s.

Half a century later, NRA leadership would actively seek out and invoke legacies of Black armed militancy and anti-racist activism for inclusion in their genealogy of “gun rights.” Decades after Robert and Mabel Williams secured their stealthy membership for the Monroe, North Carolina Black Armed Guard, NRA leaders pointed to this instance as evidence of a long tradition of advocacy for race justice and civil rights. As Robert was battling the advanced stages of cancer in the 1990s, the NRA invited him to their annual meeting to celebrate the organization’s steady support for the Black armed struggle against racial terror. Reflecting on the episode, Mabel Williams laughed as she described how NRA leaders “talked about Robert Williams and how his rifle club allowed them to survive in the racist state of North Carolina.”⁵ The irony was not lost on her.

This historical sleight-of-hand represents one among many appropriations of anti-racist civil rights legacies in the service of ostensibly race-neutral necropolitical governance. Deliberate reinventions of the past have proven vital to a contemporary agenda of “gun rights” that concentrates the power to kill into the hands of predominantly white, male-identified Armed Citizens[®] while profiting off the criminalization and disposal of vulnerable populations.⁶ The United States currently boasts the highest frequency of mass shootings,⁷ the most firearms in the world—approximately one per person—and the highest rates of incarceration. Add to this volatile mix an enduring tradition of militarized violence against people of color and low-income communities, and the necropolitical implications of a gun-saturated, militarized culture come into clearer focus. We have so thoroughly “civilized the art of killing,” in social theorist Achille Mbembe’s words, that our selective distribution of militarized might appears race-neutral and universal, an egalitarian call to arms for all “law-abiding” citizens.⁸ Even amidst increasing mounds of evidence that more guns amount to more gun deaths, that the spread of selectively Armed Citizenship renders already vulnerable and criminalized populations more precarious, the seductive promise of lethal self-defense as a right and responsibility of good citizenship triumphs over logic and empirical evidence.⁹

This essay addresses the codependency of contemporary necropolitical governance on historical narratives that frame Armed Citizenship as the heroic solution to civilian precarity and state recalcitrance. Distorted depictions of Black armed resistance empower contemporary sovereign subjects to weaponize self-defense for the efficient destruction, removal, and erasure of the socially dead. The late anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot underscored the pernicious consequences of “historical overdose,” which seems an apt description for the process through which legacies of Black militancy have been co-opted in the service of contemporary color-blind reverence for a predominantly white and masculine armed sovereign subject.¹⁰ Trouillot’s work exposes the silences that pervade the multi-layered process of historical production, emphasizing the fraught relationship between what happened and what is said to have happened. Trouillot’s attention to these “two sides of historicity” reveals how power shapes widely held historical “truths,” and how claims to historical authenticity are always subject to their producers’ biases, failures of memory, and above all, embeddedness in governing structures.¹¹ Today’s radically sovereign Armed Citizen[®]—a commodity fetish trademarked by the NRA—derives his representational and ethical power from fantasies of self-defensive heroism rooted in historical distortions that obscure the traces of armed settler colonialist violence and racial capitalism. Such historical “overdose” flattens anti-racist civil rights activism, making us “complaisant hostages” of a selective memory that serves self-destructive, necropolitical structures today.

The fiction of sovereign “gun rights,” of universal access to the tools of self-defensive lethality, underwrites neoliberal governance-as-self-care. Powerful corporate interests—including private prisons and firearm manufacturers—thrive as the state outsources the costly work of policing the ungovernable and disposing of the socially dead. Sociologist Jennifer Carlson investigates how “policing has seeped beyond the formal boundaries of the state over the past several decades,” becoming diffused among a growing cast of predominantly male and white “citizen protectors.”¹² In an age of socioeconomic decline and eroding faith in the state’s capacity to protect the citizenry, guns signify “independence, self-reliance, and civic duty” for a population that feels disenfranchised and forgotten.¹³ According to sociologist Angela Stroud, “those who see themselves as good guys rely on bad guys to make sense of themselves; to that extent good guys need the racialized and classed specter of the bad guy.”¹⁴ The spread of civilian concealed carry (now legal in all US states and territories) and “stand your ground” laws (which selectively eliminate the duty to retreat), combined with state deregulation of firearm production, distribution, and civilian ownership empower idealized “Good Guys with Guns” to assume the mantle of collective policing and securitization. The capacity to position oneself as a heroic, color-blind “Good Guy” depends increasingly upon the representational power of historic civil rights activism.

A 2015 video in the NRA’s “Freedom’s Safest Place” series features an elderly Black woman describing how the state’s restrictive gun laws, particularly the prohibition against keeping firearms in subsidized housing, prevented her from defending herself from “gang bangers and drug dealers.” “I’m a good person. I never bothered anybody,” she reassures her audience, “but I can’t afford a nice house in a safe neighborhood.” Following the standard format of the series, the woman does not provide her name, but she does brandish her civil rights credentials. She describes having “marched behind Martin Luther King at Selma” before declaring a firearm as her only true path to safety amidst urban decay.¹⁵ The ad, entitled “My Rights” capitalizes on progressive movements to defend Black lives while deploying racially coded symbols of predatory masculinity in the form of “thugs” and “gang bangers.” It positions an elderly, peace-loving activist from the mid-twentieth century as a canary in the mine of self-defensive sovereignty. If she’s not allowed to exercise her Second Amendment rights to protect herself from dangerous criminals, then what makes the (presumably white, male) viewer think those rights can’t be snatched away from him? Having participated in the 1965 march of several thousand peaceful demonstrators through Alabama, the elderly speaker wields the moral authority of nonviolent civil rights activism even as she promotes the urgent necessity of armed defense against criminal masculinities whose presence undermines both public safety and property values.¹⁶ For this Armed Citizen®, the greatest threats to her safety are today’s criminal “thugs” and the state’s intrusion on her rights; armed white nationalism is a relic of a distant past.

A recent wave of historical scholarship illuminates the role of armed Black militancy in supporting twentieth-century civil rights gains. Among them are Jasmin Young’s dissertation, “Strapped,” which analyzes the armed militancy of Black female activists, including Mabel Williams, during struggles for Black survival and citizenship.¹⁷ Historian Akinyele Umoja investigates how civil rights activists participating in peaceful demonstrations, voter registration drives, and economic boycotts looked to their armed allies for protection from state-sanctioned white supremacist violence. According to Umoja, the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups were less likely to threaten peaceful activists when they saw Black gun-owners standing sentry with their weapons at the

ready.¹⁸ Without armed protection, as Mississippi farmer Hartman Turnblow warned Martin Luther King in 1964, "this non-violent stuff" might get people killed.¹⁹

In spite of the growing collection of historical scholarship documenting Black armed resistance, our popular depictions of civil rights activism continue to emphasize and to celebrate peaceful resistance, occluding the necessity for armed militancy in the face of persistent state and civilian violence. Dominant portrayals of the modern civil rights movement as peaceful and non-violent serve our nation's dependency on linear national progress narratives in which good inevitably triumphs over evil. Historian Jeanne Theoharis discusses how "the civil rights movement became a way for the nation to feel good about its progress" without seriously engaging the complexity of Black efforts to resist white supremacy.²⁰ The militancy-obscuring, established narrative of Black civil rights locates the most extreme forms of white supremacy comfortably in the past, even as contemporary white supremacist and fascist organizations are on the rise.²¹ According to this reductionist logic, which Theoharis reveals to occlude the power and persistence of "Black organization and intrepid witness," racial terror was perpetrated by isolated pockets of reactionary racism rather than systemically embedded in our nation's governing structures.²²

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the recent wave of rich historical research on civil rights militancy has accompanied a spike in appropriation by members of an absolutist "gun rights" lobby. Eager to airbrush their own racist legacies, and to downplay the connections between reactionary armed sovereignty and white fears of Black militancy, contemporary advocates for "gun rights" position Second Amendment rights as those which always-already substantiate all other rights of citizenship. Distorted depictions of Black paramilitary self-defense illuminate the power-infused lopsidedness of "retrospective significance," as Michel-Rolph Trouillot termed the ways in which contemporary actors instrumentalize the past in justification of existing power structures.²³ Today, the NRA and its allies in Armed Citizenship claim a genealogy that includes, indeed depends upon, Black armed militancy as a legitimacy-conferring model of self-care and radical sovereignty. Framing the NRA as the nation's "longest-standing civil rights organization," white Armed Citizens fashion themselves as crusaders against "racist" gun control even as they participate in what Angela Stroud describes as a racialized calculus of identifying as "good guys with guns."²⁴ An undated article on the website Ammo.com ("Your Best Source for Discount Ammo Online") illuminates the necropolitical corporate stakes in claiming a legacy of Black armed militancy. The author described the Williams's "Black Armed Guard" as "nothing more than a fancy name for an officially chartered National Rifle Association chapter."²⁵ Here the stakes in consumer-centered sovereignty and neoliberal self-care are stark. Mabel and Robert Williams's Black Armed Guard, which took up arms in the service of collective Black "self-reliance," serves as a model of anti-government agitation for today's predominantly white Armed Citizenry. This framing reinvents the past to argue that contemporary efforts to regulate firearm usage reinforce Black subjugation, while characterizing guns and their unfettered consumption on the open market as vital to personal sovereignty against both criminal strangers and the looming specter of "big government."

Such contortions of history require significant erasure of instances in which the NRA sought to undermine armed Black activists who stood up to white supremacist violence. A favorite target of NRA criticism was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, founded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton to protect Black citizens from police brutality and harassment. Like its precursors, the Black Armed Guard in North Carolina and the Deacons of Defense in Louisiana, the Black Panthers pursued a holistic, community-centered

approach to racial justice. Armed protection from police harassment was one among many services, including free breakfasts and health clinics, that the Panthers provided for members of the communities they served.²⁶ Yet a 1970 editorial in the NRA's widely distributed publication, *American Rifleman*, condemned the Black Panther Party as a "primarily racist . . . political organization" in contrast to the NRA's "non-political and non-partisan" approach, "to preserve America by peaceful means for the sake of all good Americans."²⁷ The NRA's perception of "good Americans" clearly excluded Black activists who defied racist power structures. This editorial appeared several years before the NRA's transformation into the reactionary voice for absolutist "gun rights" that we know today. It was published three years after then California governor Ronald Reagan supported the Mulford Act, which eliminated the open carry of guns in the state.²⁸ The legislation was designed to undermine the Black Panther Party's capacity to wield firearms to protect Black citizens from police violence. The first presidential candidate publicly supported by the NRA, Ronald Reagan would join the NRA's crusade for "gun rights" for "decent law-abiding citizens," while launching a "crackdown on crime."²⁹ Reagan's surgical approach—his racially selective distribution of "gun rights"—appealed to the NRA, and his image graced the July 1983 cover of *American Rifleman*.

Given the contemporary necropolitical state's dependency on the appearance of colorblind neutrality, proponents of Armed Citizenship must distance themselves from white supremacy past and present. Contemporary champions of "gun rights," seeking the legitimacy of color-blind multiculturalism, selectively appropriate Black militancy while disparaging the critical content of contemporary movements for racial justice. The "gun rights as civil rights" narrative harnesses demands for individual rights to reactionary ideals of individual sovereignty-as-Armed Citizenship. Spurious claims to civil rights legacies reassure today's "locked and loaded" Armed Citizen[®] that being publicly armed and standing one's ground against a perceived threat are racially neutral "rights," even when such measures contribute to necropolitical governance that criminalizes Black and Brown populations. The race-neutral language of the laws governing civilian gun carry and the NRA's Armed Citizen[®] campaign promise that any/all citizens may invoke the law to "stand their ground" when in practice, the right of lethal self-defense applies only to the select few.

The false historical collapsing of civil rights with "gun rights" masks both the specificity of the past and the on-going white supremacist violence of the present. In the prevalent "gun rights" imagination, "all lives matter" is the defiant response to "Black lives matter."³⁰ White supremacy appears as either a relic of a bygone age or as a state practice of redistributive and regulatory power. Perhaps most critically, this narrative conveniently elides Black paramilitary appeals to *collective* self-defense against pervasive white supremacist power. The investment in individual, sovereign self-care reinforces what Kwame Holmes terms a "necrocapitalist" agenda of privatized security based on the extermination of Black life.³¹ It also obscures the radically collectivist political critique at the heart of on-going struggles for racial justice.

Contemporary Armed Citizenship therefore depends on a mutually reinforcing process of "historical overdose" by which individual, armed responses to perceived insecurity—embodied in racialized figures of predatory masculinity who transgress the boundaries of white property—become naturalized and celebrated as idealized citizenship. The historical ammunition of the Second Amendment that enables the Armed Citizen to flex his militarized muscle is nevertheless anchored in an exclusionary praxis of armed self-defense, and the "right to keep and bear arms" in the interest of collective "defense"

originated in an *offensive* against indigenous and Black and Brown people, sanctifying what Cheryl Harris termed “whiteness as property.”³² In order for the armed “good guy” to perform the work of necropolitical discipline, the state must minimize the social and economic costs of killing.³³ Thus legal innovations like “stand your ground” laws, concealed carry, and constitutional carry—each championed by the NRA and its legislative allies—provide the means by which those considered “law-abiding” may carry their personal arsenals into public space with little concern for criminal liability.

Perhaps another symptom of historical overdose is the continued struggle to create coherent and linear chronologies out of otherwise incomprehensible violence. Efforts to claim historical exceptionality multiply in the wake of each mass shooting. In November 2017, CNN journalist Saeed Ahmed wrote, “Mass shootings in America are getting deadlier. Of the 30 deadliest shootings in the US dating back to 1949, 18 have occurred in the last 10 years. Two of the five deadliest took place in just the last 35 days.”³⁴ Activist and journalist Shaun King described the November 2018 Sutherland Springs, Texas shooting as “the deadliest church shooting in the history of the U.S.”³⁵ Discussions of the October 2018 shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh situate it as “the deadliest [attack] on Jews in U.S. history.”³⁶ Each mass shooting sets a new precedent, ratcheting up the stakes in an increasingly deadly game.

Even as we fit mass shootings into tidy chronologies, each white-presenting male shooter—usually with a history of intimate partner or family violence—looms as an outlier, another crazed and irrational “lone wolf,” dehistoricized and unanchored from any repeating pattern of racialized gender violence. The exonerating power of armed white masculinity ensures that those responsible for our nation’s deadliest violence—from “domestic terrorism” to intimate partner violence—retain their sovereign individuality, while armed white masculinity itself remains under-examined.

These historical acts of coherent exceptionality disseminate a selective call-to-arms to those who imagine themselves as dispossessed by multicultural threats to white masculine hegemony. The construction of a legible historical narrative is vital to the process by which citizens are called upon to revere and to merit the rights of Second Amendment sovereignty. The fetishized “law-abiding citizen” must step heroically into the vacuum of unregulated violence to protect the innocent, and to defend private property from encroachment by an ever-expanding litany of predatory strangers.










Prevailing narratives about the urgent need for self-defensive violence take shape against a backdrop of typically dark, criminalized masculinities. Necropolitical Armed Citizenship serves neoliberal fragmentation, as systems of collective resistance disperse under exclusionary nationalist logics of insecurity as “stranger danger.” A parade of threatening strangers—“illegals,” “terrorists,” criminal “thugs”—invoke racial and gender tropes of primitive, predatory masculinity. This historical slippage fortifies an epistemological role-reversal where the perpetrators of violence masquerade as its victims, the victims of historic and on-going white supremacist violence are blamed as perpetrators, and Armed Citizens are heroes.³⁷





















Appropriating legacies of armed Black resistance naturalizes the corporate state’s expansion of militarized practices in the service of personal and national security. As demonstrated in the rapid spread of “stand your ground” laws to over half the states, the epistemological connective tissue between a corporatizing carceral state and a necrocapitalist territorial crisis in value renders vulnerable lives disposable while

weaponizing self-defense for the select few.³⁸ Appeals to civil rights legacies confer legitimacy on a contemporary project of necropolitical governance, an alliance of militarized corporatism and neoliberal extraction, based on a color-blind ethos of self-care in which *all* good citizens are Armed Citizens, and those targeted by police and civilian brutality are retroactively labeled criminal “bad guys.”³⁹ Such historical overdose effaces the asymmetrical violence of dispossession and disposability, while naturalizing a color-blind slippage of false equivalencies.

Selective memorialization of Black militancy as a model of individual armed sovereignty perpetuates belief in Armed Citizenship as the *only* solution to our most pressing security threats. Meanwhile, contemporary reverence for peaceful civil rights struggle sanitizes the violence of the twentieth century while distracting us from the significance of collective Black militancy to civil rights successes. When the champions of necropolitical governance usurp legacies of Black armed militancy, they invest the cry of “gun rights” with the moral authority of anti-racist civil rights, while equating gun regulation with white supremacy. But the pitfalls of “historical overdose” cut both ways; as progressive critics of “gun rights” attribute our epidemic of gun violence to the powerful influence of the NRA and other advocates of absolutist, individual Armed Citizenship, we risk missing the wider epistemological web in which gun control efforts depend—historically and in the present—on racialized appeals to “Stranger Danger.” We must acknowledge and account for the historic complicity of “gun control” with the criminalization of vulnerable populations, lest we remain captive to the history-distorting, panic-based propaganda of contemporary Armed Citizenship. Our resistance to a necropolitical agenda of “gun rights” sovereignty must defy the historical flattening of struggles for racial justice, lest we too become seduced by a radically individualist fantasy of violent self-care.

Notes

1. See the NRA website: National Rifle Association, “About the NRA,” <https://home.nra.org/about-the-nra/> < <https://home.nra.org/about-the-nra/> > 
2. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1994) xviii. 
3. Mabel Williams, interview by David Cecelski, August 20, 1999, interview K-0266, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection, UNC Center for the Study of the American South, Chapel Hill, NC. 
4. Williams, interview. 
5. Williams, interview. 
6. Since the early twentieth century, “Armed Citizen” has been the title of the NRA’s American Rifleman column about civilians who fight crime using firearms. More recently, the NRA registered “Armed Citizen” as a trademark. 
7. According to the United States Congressional Research Service, a mass shooting is defined as an incident in which more than four people—not including the shooter—are killed. 
8. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” (trans. Libby Meintjes) *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003) 11–40. 
9. See, for example, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center’s literature review by Lisa Hepburn and David Hemenway, “Firearm Availability and Homicide: A Review of the Literature,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior: A Review Journal* 9 (2004): 417–40. 

10. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, xviii. 
11. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 24. 
12. Jennifer Carlson, *Citizen Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 172. 
13. Carlson, *Citizen Protectors*, 112. 
14. Angela Stroud, *Good Guys With Guns: the Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 110. 
15. NRA, *Freedom's Safest Place/My Freedom*, YouTube, accessed April 24, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2Aj1WnNkYI. 
16. Kwame Holmes discusses the value of Black death to middle class property values in "Necrocapitalism, Or the Value of Black Death," *Bully Bloggers*, 2017. 
17. Jasmin A. Young, "Strapped: A Historical Analysis of Black Women and Armed Resistance, 1959–1979" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2018). See also Charles Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Lance E. Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Nicholas Johnson, *Negroes and the Gun: The Black Tradition of Arms* (Prometheus Books, 2014); Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Christopher Strain, *Pure Fire: Self-Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Akinyele Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007). 
18. Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back*, 271–274. 
19. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff*, 7. 
20. Jeanne Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: the Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), ix. See also Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry's introduction to their edited volume, *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 1–4. 
21. ADL Center on Extremism, "The New Hate and Old: The Changing Face of American White Supremacy," 2018, accessed June 18, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/new-hate-and-old> < <https://www.adl.org/new-hate-and-old> > . 
22. Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, xi. 
23. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26–27. 
24. For a detailed discussion of the racial, class, and gender calculus of seeing oneself as an armed "good guy," see Angela Stroud's chapter "Good Guys and Bad Guys," *Good Guys*, 83–111. 
25. "Robert F. Williams and Armed Black Self-Defense," Ammo.com, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://ammo.com/articles/guns-nra-and-american-civil-rights-movement-guide> < <https://ammo.com/articles/guns-nra-and-american-civil-rights-movement-guide> > . 
26. Nick Chiles, "8 Black Panther Party Programs That Were More Empowering Than Federal Government Programs," *Atlanta Black Star*, March 26, 2015. 
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29. Ronald Reagan, address to the NRA annual meeting, *American Rifleman*, May 1984, 40. 

30. Recent examples include Don McDougall, "Do All Lives Matter? 5 Questions for the Anti-Gun Left," Ammoland.com, March 15, 2016, and the KKK-sponsored "White Lives Matter" demonstration in Anaheim, California on February 27, 2016. [↗](#)
31. Holmes, "Necrocapitalism." [↗](#)
32. Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property: Race, Racism, and the Law," *Harvard Law Review* 106 (June 1993): 1709; See also Roxane Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2018). [↗](#)
33. Marcus Lee, "Originating Stand Your Ground: Racial Violence and Neoliberal Reason," *Du Bois Review Social Science Research on Race* (May 2019): 1–23. [↗](#)
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35. Shaun King, "THIS PAST SUNDAY morning, Devin Patrick Kelley walked into a small country church in the rural south Texas town of Sutherland Springs and shot nearly every single person in the building," Facebook post, November 8, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/shaunking/posts/this-past-sunday-morning-devin-patrick-kelley-walked-into-a-small-country-church/1600623783309867/> <
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36. See, for example Avi Selk, Tim Craig, Shawn Boburg, and Andrew Ba Tran, "'They Showed his Photo, and My Stomach Just Dropped': Neighbors Recall Synagogue Massacre Suspect as a Loner," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2018; and Campbell Robertson, Christopher Mele, and Sabrina Tavernise, "11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged With 29 Counts," *New York Times*, October 27, 2018. [↗](#)
37. Legal scholar Mary Anne Franks discusses white hetero-masculine "victim-claiming" in *The Cult of the Constitution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), xii–xiii. [↗](#)
38. See Caroline Light, *Stand Your Ground: A History of America's Love Affair with Lethal Self-Defense* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017). [↗](#)
39. Stroud, *Good Guys*, 85–87; 101–104. [↗](#)

Author Information

Caroline Light [↗](#)

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1990—Alliances from the Rubble

by Kourtney M. Maison and Katelyn E. Brooks | Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020),
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ABSTRACT At the dawn of the 1990s, the world was undergoing dramatic transformation—and cultural studies was no exception to this force. By looking at the Illinois conference, the Oklahoma conference, and the special issue of *Cultural Studies* edited by Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram, we evaluate how cultural studies reacted to the sweeping tide of reformation and re-commitment of the 1990s. Ultimately, these events prove that, in 1990, cultural studies made the most of the opportunity to reflect, listen to its critics, and change for the better, and each event can serve as a valuable touchstone as we continue to construct and deconstruct our discipline.

KEYWORDS 1990, cultural studies

1990 was a year of blooming popularity for cultural studies.¹ Decades after the fact, it seems predictable that cultural studies, like so much else, would be bolstered and renewed in the transformative moment the nineties brought in. Michael Berube notes, recalling the bubble's growth, "In the late 1980s and early 1990s, we heard (and I believed) that cultural studies would fan out across the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, inducing them to become at once more self-critical and more open to public engagement. Some people even suggested, in either hope or fear, that cultural studies would become the name for the humanities and social sciences in toto."² While the latter never came to pass, and there are conflicting explanations of how cultural studies notably managed to snag the limelight, the energy surrounding cultural studies in 1990 seemed to promise extensive growth and untapped potential.

As interest in the field grew, cultural studies scholars appeared intent on integrating themselves into institutions with access to classrooms and student populations that had previously been unavailable to them.³ Taking advantage of this fragile moment was a primary concern for cultural studies, as key disciplines had already discounted the field as a non-discipline with unsustainable or outright problematic theoretical and political leanings.⁴ The rapid inflation of interest gave cultural studies leverage with which to integrate into other fields, such as literary criticism. Because of this, 1990 was a year of outreach for cultural studies—a year of coordinated, persistent efforts to engage other disciplines, be welcomed into them, and find a space dedicated to cultural studies from which to engage them. This cooperation resulted in a push towards both interdisciplinarity and institutionalization—a set of conflicting goals brought to a head several times in conferences and publications in 1990.⁵

While cultural studies engaged with whether to and how to institutionalize cultural studies in an academic home, there were multiple inferences that American scholars were not acknowledging the already established history of cultural studies in other parts of the

world (namely British, Canadian, and Australian).⁶ This tension was not formally resolved in the 1990s and arguably continues to persist and evolve well into the 2010s with calls to re-politicize cultural studies scholarship.⁷ However, at the time, it seems, the general interest in cultural studies deviated substantially from American scholars simply “paying dues” to our British and Australian lineage, and instead delved into interrogating the problematic foundations of this lineage from methodological, theoretical, and institutional standpoints. The conferences and publications of 1990 were deeply affected by the divide between those wishing to stay close to the British and Australian roots of cultural studies and those looking to explore the unique perspectives of other disciplines.

The simultaneous desires in cultural studies during 1990 to integrate (but remain undiluted), institutionalize (but remain critically capable), and reflect (while preserving canon) created a unique moment of production, in which seasoned and opinionated cultural studies scholars had to contend with the perspectives of other disciplines. These interrogations fundamentally challenged the core methodologies, theories, and the institutionalization of cultural studies. However, while the year 1990 provided a challenge for cultural studies, the way this field dealt with that challenge reflects an honest commitment to intellectual rigor, openness, and persistence. In this essay, we have chosen to discuss three key events of 1990 that represent this commitment: first, the April 1990 academic conference “Cultural Studies Now and in the Future” held at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (commonly referred to as the “Illinois Conference”), which demonstrates a commitment to internal reflection; second, the October 1990 academic conference “Crossing the Disciplines: Cultural Studies in the 1990s” held at the University of Oklahoma (commonly referred to as the “Oklahoma Conference”), which exhibits an openness to critique and conversation; and third, issue three of volume four in *Cultural Studies*, the journal’s special issue “Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses,” which displays an interest in forging productive relationships between cultural studies and disciplines which critiqued it on a substantive level (such as literary criticism and Chicana/o studies, which we feature in this summary).⁸

The Year 1990

It would be arguably irresponsible not to address the events surrounding the frenzied growth of cultural studies. Since its formal and professional beginnings at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, political and societal contexts have been a key influence on and motivator for scholarly projects within cultural studies. It is no surprise, then, that at a major intersection for cultural studies, manifested in a reflection upon our foundations and an invitation for revision, that there were many significant political and social events taking place across the globe animated by that same exigency. In early 1990, George H. W. Bush’s presidency began, promising a new engagement with American militaristic foreign policy in his inaugural speech, reflecting on the mistakes made by his political predecessors during the Vietnam War.⁹ 1990 also marked the beginning stages of German reunification, as East Germans participated in the first (and only) free election in the German Democratic Republic.¹⁰ Margaret Thatcher, who had been facing leadership challenges, resigned in November 1990, while Mikhail Gorbachev was elected as the first (and only) president of the USSR.¹¹ Meanwhile, tensions broke in the Middle East, culminating with Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990 and American (and allied forces’) intervention through the Gulf War.¹² In South America, the elections mandated in the newly-drawn (1987) Nicaraguan constitution saw Violetta Chamorro

became Nicaragua's first (and only) female president on the promise of bringing an end to the decades-long Contra wars.¹³

Alongside these political transformations, concerns about the environment began to gain attention, marked by several environmental tragedies, such as an oil spill along Ninety Mile Beach in East Gippsland, Victoria, Australia. Following these environmental crises, the European Union established the European Environmental Agency, and the United States passed the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act.¹⁴ Technologically, 1990 was also a time of new beginnings; ARPANET (the modern internet's American military predecessor) was decommissioned in late February of 1990.¹⁵ As ARPANET was decommissioned, Tim Berners-Lee, a British computer scientist, began formal work on establishing the World Wide Web in October of 1990.¹⁶

While the events considered influential here were not explicitly discussed in most of the following literature or conference proceedings, it is likely that the zeitgeist of revisions and commitments which swirled around 1990 and settled in cultural studies started from the energy of new foundations these events created.

Breaking Foundations: The "Illinois Conference"

The recrudescence of 1990, emphasized in the culmination of dramatic political changes within Europe as well as the "renewed vow" of former President Bush's foreign policy, seems to have likewise animated the desire of cultural studies to reflect on their methodological, theoretical, and institutional constructions. Reflections on discipline and method were central features at what is colloquially known as the 1990 "Illinois Conference," held at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in April 1990 and entitled "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future." This conference was the first major cultural studies conference in the United States, taking place amidst a fast-paced growth in cultural studies in American scholarship.¹⁷ The edited volume *Cultural Studies* consolidated key papers presented at the conference and various related discussions.¹⁸ Editors Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg presented selected essays, chosen for a variety of reasons: the selections that aligned most with the period of renewal and reestablishment at the time were those included in order to highlight works that "represented a viable alternative tradition in cultural studies."¹⁹ However, the simultaneous desire for cultural studies to expand and reinvigorate its constituency also motivated inclusion of selected essays "to present cultural studies as a genuinely international phenomenon and to help people compare and contrast the work being done in different countries," as well as other works not explicitly or entirely within cultural studies which were included because they "had the potential for productive alliances with cultural studies."²⁰

The use of sixteen organizing themes allowed presenters to put multiple key concerns within cultural studies in conversation and conflict with one another; these combinations exposed significant tensions that were felt and articulated within the field of cultural studies.²¹ One of these significant tensions was the changing landscape of methodologies utilized in cultural studies research in 1990, likely brought to a head by cultural studies' engagement with several previously separate methodological approaches, such as literary criticism, ethnography, and semiotics. For example, Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg

address cultural studies' complicated relationship with methodology, claiming that there is no distinct methodology for cultural studies, that "the choice of research practices depends on the questions that are asked."²² Cultural studies had eschewed adopting formalized disciplinary practices, such as a "standardized" methodology because they "carry with them a heritage of disciplinary investments and exclusions and a history of social effects that cultural studies would often be included to repudiate."²³

Despite the fundamental distance cultural studies has placed between itself and methodological designation, supporters of methodological specificity, and in particular, supporters of ethnography, made space for themselves during the Illinois conferences. These essays, among others predating the Illinois Conference and published since *Cultural Studies*, sought to illustrate ethnography's particular potential within cultural studies and propose a methodological standard for how to conduct ethnography within context. Essays on this topic included Rosalind Brunt's "Engaging With the Popular: Audiences for Mass Culture and What to Say About Them," James Clifford's "Traveling Cultures," John Fiske's "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life," Simon Frith's "The Cultural Study of Popular Music," and Constance Penley's "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture."²⁴ Brunt's article critiques cultural studies' "simplified account of 'engagement' with the media text" observed in Stuart Hall's model of encoding/decoding, Frank Parkin's schema of "value systems," and David Morley's Nationwide study.²⁵ Utilizing Paul Willis to articulate ethnography's contribution to cultural studies, Brunt argued for its capability "of being surprised, of reaching knowledge not prefigured in one's starting paradigms" and illustrates its productivity through her previous work on media and British politics with Jordin.²⁶ In the discussion section, Sher Parks offered that ethnography, or becoming a participant with the group being studied, is a way to resist the traditional researcher/subject power relationship; Brunt responded to this suggestion by stating that such an approach would be as useful as the questions being asked allows.²⁷ Clifford's essay complicated the traditionally (anthropologically) held assumptions about ethnography and culture by questioning "how cultural analysis constitutes its objects—societies, traditions, communities, identities—in spatial terms through specific spatial practices of research."²⁸

Forming Alliances: The "Oklahoma Conference"

Likely spurred on by the cooperative spirit of 1990, characterized by German reunification and improving relations with the USSR, cultural studies took important steps to create lasting and fertile relationships with other disciplines. It was only after *Cultural Studies* (the edited book), which emphasized interdisciplinary scholarship, was published in 1992 that *Cultural Studies* (the journal) began featuring a handful of pages devoted to "other journals in the field of cultural studies."²⁹ However, the call to expand and multiply the usefulness and applications of cultural studies was an undercurrent to much of the exigence of the "Illinois Conference." At a time when cultural studies was looking to make its way into other fields, allies to the field made a sustained effort to open doors. Robert Con Davis-Uniado, who was by education a literary theorist and critic, was among the earliest allies to cultural studies in literary criticism. Con Davis-Uniado strongly felt that literary criticism and cultural studies were beneficial bedfellows, arguing:

The study of criticism can profitably be situated as a part—and a leading part—of the study of culture . . . In fact, a strong argument can be made that the texts we customarily call literature constitute a privileged site where the most important social, psychological, and cultural forces combine and contend.³⁰

However, there were notable detractors from this frame, including John Deely, the contemporary editor of *Semiotics*, and Aijaz Ahmad, an influential theorist in the field.³¹ Ahmad particularly disliked American cultural studies, which he argued had moved away from the Marxist political roots of British cultural studies. A committed Marxist, Ahmad has consistently critiqued postmodern and imperialist approaches to cultural criticism, most notably in his responses to Frederic Jameson and Edward Said. These critiques, while multifaceted, always return to the ways that postmodern approaches to cultural studies lack the capability of Marxist intervention.³² He echoed the thoughts of Meaghan Morris, who argued in her own 1990 publication that the sudden expansion of cultural studies in the 1990s served “the immediate political function,” of discrediting “grumpy feminists and cranky leftists.”³³ Despite the detraction of influential peers, Con Davis-Uniado organized a conference in 1990 to investigate how cultural studies might be used in other disciplines, sponsored by the Oklahoma Project for Discourse and Theory and scheduled to take place in conjunction with the 16th Annual Meeting of the Semiotics Society of America.³⁴ The conference, entitled “Crossing Disciplines: Cultural Studies in the ‘90s,” featured presentations from various disciplines, including semiotics, psychology, and composition.³⁵ The presentations resulted in a few publications, most of which were published *Semiotics*, and are available through their archives. Nelson and Jeffrey R. Di Leo were (and are) at odds on the success of the conference intellectually. Nelson argues (among other things) that semiotics could not integrate into cultural studies as an apolitical entity. In contrast, Di Leo rebuts that semiotics was never an apolitical discipline. He roundly rejects Nelson’s critiques of the conference’s lack of knowledge or attention to the “British history” of cultural studies, noting that the conference (which was meant as an introduction to cultural studies for outsiders) was unfairly criticized for attempting to create community and intellectual cooperation.³⁶ However, despite the continued disagreement as to the intellectual impact of the “Oklahoma Conference,” and a general lack of notable citations, the conference makes up for as a marker of the start of a functional and beneficial relationship between cultural studies and other disciplines, providing access to fields with larger student populations and public support.³⁷

While it is notable that the “Oklahoma Conference” is generally well-accepted as being among the first of many attempts to investigate cultural studies’ formal and professional relationship with other disciplines, it is perhaps more important for the symbolism of Con Davis-Uniado’s own turn towards cultural studies, and his efforts to deliver that perspective to students in his field. Con Davis-Uniado’s integration of cultural studies into the third and fourth editions of his undergraduate textbook, *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, while treating the discipline slightly better than neutrally, was a meaningful introduction of theory to a broader audience. Including these authors and theories within a literary criticism textbook shows an effort to decenter the fear that such an elitist representation might unintentionally discredit the politics of these movements and projects a choice to instead engage on a theoretical level what these theories might provide for literary critics as tools for their politics.

Deely’s simultaneous 1990 *Semiotics* article argued that semiotic interests needed to generalize into a foundational educational department to ensure their survival rather than attaching itself to “fashionable” studies of the time (which we cannot help but read as a

not-so-subtle jab at cultural studies' sudden popularity). Despite this position, Con Davis-Uniado's organization of the 1990 "Oklahoma Conference" reflects a turn by scholars in semiotics, and indeed elsewhere, to engage with critical studies despite a worry that it might "succeed as a coherent practice but fail as a cultural critique."³⁸ This was a fortuitous turn, as the cracked door that the 1990 "Oklahoma Conference" represented soon turned to an open one; many scholars found themselves not only interested in cultural studies but deeply involved with it (including Con Davis-Uniado himself, who starting in the late 1990s turned towards work within American studies and Chicana/o studies).³⁹

Rebuilding, Together: Productive Revisions Alongside Our Critics

During this time, cultural studies struggled with its political foundations in a rapidly expanding world that was filled with new issues and questions to consider. However, as scholars explored cultural issues outside of the Eurocentric canon of cultural studies, they encountered spirited resistance. In the edited volume of papers from the "Illinois Conference," a tension arises between cultural studies' foundational literature, its institutionalization, and its ability to productively critique new contexts outside of Europe's purview. Notable papers include Angie Chabram-Dernersesian's "I Throw Punches for My Race, but I Don't Want to Be a Man: Writing Us—Chicana—nos (Girls, Us)/Chicanas—into the Movement Script" and Catherine Hall's "Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s."⁴⁰ Chabram-Dernersesian's essay critiques the Chicano movement for relying on machoism at the expense of Chicana identity and addresses responses to the movement that highlights Chicana identity and pointedly articulates the need for intersectionality by arguing that sex and gender are not divorced from politics and ethnicity.⁴¹ Embedded in the essays, there is a sustained call towards an intersectional cultural studies ethic, insisting that intersectionality is, or at least should be, integral to cultural studies research because of the prioritization of (inter)relations in prior literature.⁴² This push towards intersectionality was one of many critiques that other fields brought against cultural studies literature, providing a productive deconstruction of the field as it had been built, and offering a hopeful pathway towards a better, reconstructed cultural studies.

The Oklahoma and Illinois conferences gave room for discussion—but the space had to be made, as intersectionality was not a cultural studies theory in origin or application.⁴³ It is fitting, then, that rather than taking place at the Oklahoma or Illinois conferences, the special issue of *Cultural Studies* published in its fourth-ever volume featuring Chicana/o Cultural studies work was the consequence of a conference in a different field. As Fregoso and Chabram-Dernersesian explain in the introduction to the special issue, their panel at the 1989 National Association for Chicano Studies in Los Angeles, entitled "Chicano Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourse," sought to intervene in the problematic notion of the single Chicana/o identity that sterile academic treatment of the Chicana/o community as artifact cultivates.⁴⁴ Through the use of Hall, whose theories make room for the "critical points of difference" which deeply affect individual Chicana/o identities, Fregoso and Chabram-Dernersesian pushed for a nuanced consideration of Chicana/o existence which broke out of both Chicana/o Studies' and European critical theory's homogenization of difference.⁴⁵















In the issue, the authors questioned the critical foundations, methodologies, and institutionalization of Chicana/o studies and its tentative theoretical neighbor, cultural studies. Alarcón pushed against the presentation of unified Chicana subject, as the intersecting discourses which produce Chicanas (and women of color more broadly) are fundamentally contradictory and produce incoherent subjects.⁴⁶ In her piece within the issue, Chabram-Denerseian argues for an exploration of alternative methodologies, including ethnographies, to resist the “fragmentary and over-specialized” structure of contemporary Chicana/o studies.⁴⁷ Sanchez takes this critique farther and argues that academia is a space that masks its inability to foster change and reinforces class privilege and domination, not-so-subtle co-opting, silencing, or ignoring the resistance of scholars.⁴⁸ These articles, as well as the fact that they appear within *Cultural Studies*, speak to the productive critique that the mission for alliances brought cultural studies more broadly. The desire to disburse the theories and arguments central to cultural studies invited outsiders to move in. With that influx of outside perspectives (and even the perspectives of some within the field), the foundations of cultural studies were suddenly much less secure. However, rather than reacting to these critiques as attacks or incompatibilities, the contemporary editors of *Cultural Studies*, to their credit, gave these issues a forum, ostensibly in the hope of creating meaningful and productive dialogue that might change cultural studies for the better.

This issue laid a foundation for the active inquiry on the usefulness and purpose of difference in cultural studies. It gave voice to the limitations of European critical theory’s uncritical application onto outside contexts, and even the limitations of the academic model of ethnic or cultural studies itself.⁴⁹ To attend to the “complexities of a historical experience,” the special issue was dedicated to examining and interrogating self-representations within Chicana/o cultures.⁵⁰ This goal was met and surpassed as pieces such as Chabram-Denerseian and Alarcón’s persist as important work on Chicana/o identities and the relationship between identity and culture. At the same time, the energy which animated the issue continues to push scholars to question the taken for granted theoretical and institutional standards of cultural studies.⁵¹

A New Foundation

In 1990, cultural studies scholars were presented a stressful and challenging task: to look back at the foundations of cultural studies through the eyes of other disciplines and thoughtfully consider the ways that our history and canon might fail. Amid political, ecological, and technological change, it could have been easy to ignore the question altogether and recommit blindly to the legacy of British and Australian cultural studies in America. However, if the year 1990 has anything to teach cultural studies scholars as we move forward, it is that, whether we choose to renew our vows to our canon or decide the very foundations of the field must be broken, it is always worthwhile to at least listen and consider the voices of our intellectual peers. Perhaps we will disagree with them, but we may also create a more robust, more productive theory and application. The “Illinois Conference” shows the power of internal reflection within our discipline; the “Oklahoma Conference” shows the willingness of other disciplines to consider and test our arguments; the special issue of *Cultural Studies* in 1990 shows our potential, if we accept and engage those challenges, to come through these discussions as better fields.

Notes

1. Michael Berube, "What's the Matter with Cultural Studies?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 14, 2009. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Whats-the-Matter-With/48334> <
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Whats-the-Matter-With/48334>> . 
2. Berube, "What's the Matter." 
3. Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1991). 
4. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies." 
5. The influential conferences in 1990 include "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future" hosted by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in April 1990, referred to as the "Illinois Conference," and "Crossing the Disciplines: Cultural Studies in the 1990s" hosted by the University of Oklahoma in October 1990, referred to as the "Oklahoma Conference." A key publication from 1990 is a special issue in *Cultural Studies* (volume 4, no. 3) on Chicana/o representations, titled "Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses." Papers and commentary from the "Illinois Conference" are featured in the collection *Cultural Studies*, edited by Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg, 1991. 
6. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies." 
7. Ted Striphas, "Caring for Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies*, November 8, 2018, 1–16. 
8. John Deely, "Logic within Semiotics," *Semiotics* 10 (1990). The particular term we have used, "fashionable," is taken from John Deely's 1990 publication in *Semiotics*, but arguably represents a broader suspicion of the longevity and ultimate purpose of cultural studies expressed by other scholars. 
9. George H. W. Bush Presidential Library & Museum, "Inaugural Address," *Public Papers*, accessed November 22, 2018, np. 
10. Geoffrey Pridham and Tatu Vanhanen, *Democratization in Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994). 
11. Alan Walters, "Sir Geoffrey Howe's Resignation was Fatal Blow in Mrs. Thatcher's Political Assassination," *Times*, December 6, 1990, 12.; "On Establishment of the Presidency of the Soviet Union and Amendments and Additions to the Constitution (Basic Law) of the Soviet Union," *Constitution of the USSR and the RSFSR*, accessed November 22, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20130216085400/http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/red_1977/1549448/chapter/16/. 
12. George H. W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress," Miller Center of Public Affairs., accessed November 22, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110116162710/http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3425> 
13. Mark Uhlig, "Turnover in Nicaragua; Nicaraguan Opposition Routs Sandinistas; U.S. Pledges Aid, Tied to Orderly Turnover," *New York Times*, February 27, 1990; Sara Fritz, "U.S. Accused of Trying to Buy Election: Nicaragua: The Administration Insists That the \$9 million It Seeks for the Opposition Party is Needed to Offset the Well-financed Sandinistas," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1989. It should be noted that then-President Bush's Administration, in several forms, had extended intervention prior to the Nicaraguan elections. The depth and long-lasting impact of this intervention, of which Violetta Chamorro's election can be considered a part, is a complex issue we cannot hope to address here adequately, and this very concise summary should not indicate any uncritical support of these actions. 
14. Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (104 Stat. 2468, Pub. L. 101–549). 
15. Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000). There are, of course, earlier and contemporary sources within government documents (such as the ARPANET Completion

Report), which discuss the eventual decommission of ARPANET. However, the governmental sources lacked a definitive date and explanation of the deconstruction of the project, which modern sources more reliably relate. [↗](#)

16. We acknowledge that Berners-Lee himself discusses his success on this project beginning in 1989, rather than 1990. However, while Berners-Lee had already begun his attempts to create a sustainable network in 1989, Berners' degrees of success were only beginning to leak to the public during 1990, so his previous successes in 1989 aren't forefronted here because they lacked popular awareness. [↗](#)
17. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, cultural studies was a common topic of discussion at academic conferences through panels. Echoing the sentiments of multiple scholars, including Cary Nelson, we regard the "Illinois Conference" as the first major conference devoted explicitly to cultural studies rather than simply included as panel topics. For further discussion of other conferences, see Cary Nelson, "Always Already Cultural Studies: Two Conferences and a Manifesto," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 24, no. 1 (1991): 24–25. [↗](#)
18. Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: A Users Guide to This Book," in *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1991), 17–23. [↗](#)
19. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies," 11. [↗](#)
20. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies," 11. [↗](#)
21. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: A Users Guide to This Book," 1. The sixteen themes used for organization were the history of cultural studies; gender and sexuality; nationhood and national identity; colonialism and postcolonialism; race and ethnicity; popular culture and its audiences; identity politics; pedagogy; politics of aesthetics; culture and its institutions; ethnography and cultural studies; politics of disciplinarity; discourse and textuality; science, culture, and the ecosystem; rereading history; and global culture in a postmodern age. The papers crossed anywhere from two to four themes. [↗](#)
22. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies," 2. [↗](#)
23. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies," 2. [↗](#)
24. Rosalind Brunt, "Engaging With the Popular: Audiences For Mass Culture and What To Say About Them," in *Cultural Studies*, 69–81; James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, 96–117; John Fiske, "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life," in *Cultural Studies*, 154–174; Simon Frith, "The Cultural Study of Popular Music," in *Cultural Studies*, 174–187; Constance Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture," in *Cultural Studies*, 479–500. [↗](#)
25. Brunt, "Engaging with the Popular," 78–80. [↗](#)
26. Brunt, "Engaging with the Popular," 78. [↗](#)
27. Brunt, "Engaging with the Popular," 80. [↗](#)
28. Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," 97. [↗](#)
29. These issues were *Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2, 301–305 (1992); *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2, 344–348 (1993); *Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1, 184–188 (1994). [↗](#)
30. Susan Huddleston Edgerton, *Multiculturalism into Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 18. The origin of this quote is uncertain; Huddleston-Edgerton cites Con Davis-Undiano as the author in her work and correlates this with the "Oklahoma Conference" as she covers the boon of cultural studies interest in the early 1990s. Noting that Con Davis-Undiano and Scheifler were both said to have spoken at the conference, this quotation may be from either a conference presentation or a keystone speaking event. Without any other record of this statement, we will cite Huddleston Edgerton's text for this quotation. [↗](#)
31. John Deely, "Logic within Semiotics," *Semiotics* 10 (1990): 77–86.; Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Brooklyn: Verso, 1992). It is difficult to find a particular moment

from either Deely's or Ahmad's texts to encapsulate their critiques and suspicions of cultural studies. Deely, who was then editor of *Semiotics* and a recent president of the Semiotics Society of America, tended to summarize his distaste for cultural studies on the grounds of its apparent lack of coherency and staying power. Ahmad, a vocal and well-regarded post-colonial literary theorist, instead critiqued the critical foundations of cultural studies, arguing that postmodern and post-structural materialisms lacked real-world motivations and applications, especially within post-coloniality. This is, at best, a minimal summary of their complex opinions, and we encourage you to see the referenced citations for a more thorough entrée into their works. [↗](#)

32. Deely, "Logic"; Ahmad, *In Theory*; Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3–25. Ahmad is, in his own right, an influential figure in cultural studies, and has provided many pivotal critiques which have helped form cultural studies as it is today. Ahmad leveled an extensive critique of Jameson's work in particular, including the obliterative homogeneity his approach assumed and its lack of intellectual rigor. Likewise, Ahmad's lengthy critique of Said pointed out his reproduction of liberal humanism in his efforts to resist it and singled out his tendency to uphold singular texts as cultural monoliths. The particular critiques we reference, which include arguments made in "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" and *In Theory*, do not refer to many of the more pivotal contributions Ahmad is responsible for in the interest of space and clarity. [↗](#)
33. Meaghan Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies," in *Logics of Television*, edited by Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Morris's main argument of this particular essay is more deeply centered on the transformation of cultural studies into a saleable, desirable intellectual industry, intervening in its ability to produce "original or heterodox" work within the cultural studies institution. These critiques, while still playing towards the tension surrounding institutionalization, are left out in favor of her ultimate conclusion, that the state of cultural studies around the 1990s discredited the politics it was supposed to serve. [↗](#)
34. Huddleston Edgerton, *Multiculturalism*, 17. [↗](#)
35. Huddleston Edgerton, *Multiculturalism*, 18. [↗](#)
36. Nelson, "Always Already Cultural Studies," 24–38; Jeffrey R. Di Leo, "Cultural Studies, Semiotics, and the Politics of Repacking Theory," in *Academic Degree Zero: Reconsidering the Politics of Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 89–101. [↗](#)
37. Di Leo, "Cultural Studies, Semiotics," 95–101. [↗](#)
38. Robert Con Davis-Uniando and Ronald Schleifer, editors, *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies* (London: Pearson, 1998). [↗](#)
39. "Robert Con Davis-Undiano," College of Arts and Sciences, Department of English, University of Oklahoma, accessed November 22, 2018, <http://www.ou.edu/cas/english/about/faculty/robert-con-davis-undiano>. [↗](#)
40. Chabram-Dernersesian, Angie, "I Throw Punches For My Race, But I Don't Want to Be a Man: Writing Us—Chica-nos (Girl, Us)/Chicanas—into the Movement Script," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Pearson, 1998), 81–95. [↗](#)
41. Chabram-Dernersesian, "I Throw Punches"; Catherine Hall, "Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840's," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Pearson, 1998), 240–276. [↗](#)
42. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction." [↗](#)
43. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139–168. [↗](#)
44. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing"; Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, "Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses," *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (1990): 203–216. [↗](#)
45. Fregoso and Chabram-Dernersesian, "Chicana/o Cultural Representations," 206. [↗](#)

46. Norma Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'the' Native Woman," *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (1990): 248–256. [↗](#)
 47. Angie Chabram-Dernerseian, "Chicana/o Studies as Oppositional Ethnography," *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (1990): 228–247; Rafael Chabran, "Changing Paradigms in Chicano Studies: Ethnography, Oppositional Ethnography, and Ethnobiography," Julian Somora Research Institute, Occasional Paper 31 (1997): 7; National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, "NACS 17th Annual Conference Program," NACCS Conference Programs, Book 9 (1998). [↗](#)
 48. Rosaura Sanchez, "Ethnicity, Ideology, and Academia," *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (1990): 294–302. [↗](#)
 49. Rosaura Sanchez, "Ethnicity, Ideology, and Academia," 294–302. [↗](#)
 50. Fregoso and Chabram-Dernerseian, "Chicana/o Cultural Representations," 248. [↗](#)
 51. Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism," 248–256; Chabram, "Chicana/o Studies," 228–247. [↗](#)
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Author Information

Kourtney M. Maison

Kourtney Maison is a PhD Candidate at the University of Utah studying rhetorics of health and medicine. Her research focuses on the rhetorical interactions between body, humanity, and disability.

[View all of Kourtney M. Maison's articles.](#)

Katelyn E. Brooks

Katelyn Brooks is an incoming PhD student at Purdue University for fall 2020. Her research focuses on political and policy communication and social media use from members of Congress. She recently earned her master's at the University of Utah.

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Review of *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* by Kristen Ghodsee (Duke University Press)

by Steven Gotzler | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT Kristen Ghodsee's *Second World, Second Sex* recovers the historical legacy of women from the Eastern bloc and post-colonial Africa as political activists for women's rights and diplomats for socialist and non-aligned nations during the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985. *Second World, Second Sex* challenges the conventional wisdom of three-wave feminist history by documenting the critical interventions made by women in service of a vision of equality that was always already intersectional, and that refused to separate women's issues from questions of neo-colonialism, racism, and economic re-distribution. It offers a helpful and instructive reminder of socialist feminism's rich and global history of organization and action, a history that was created and fought for in large part by alliances of women from non-aligned and socialist countries during the Cold War and whose memory is all too often erased from dominant Western histories of the women's movement.

KEYWORDS Cold War, feminism, intersectionality, socialism

Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War. By Kristen Ghodsee. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019, 328 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978-1-4780-0181-2. US List: \$26.95.

Kristen Ghodsee's *Second World, Second Sex* recovers the historical legacy of women from the Eastern bloc and post-colonial Africa as political activists for women's rights and diplomats for socialist and non-aligned nations during the UN Decade for Women, 1975–1985. Ghodsee offers a counter-measure to a double erasure in twentieth century global history. First, by telling *herstories* of female subjects whose lives and labors have been all too often erased from standard historical narratives, even progressive ones. And second, by revealing the forgotten achievements of the socialist “second world,” largely ignored by the post-Cold War triumphalism of establishment academic culture in the West. Ghodsee's account is culled from painstaking archival research mainly in Bulgaria and Zambia, as well as ethnographic work conducted in interviews with prominent surviving women from the period.

The book first provides a deep background of postwar women's activism in Bulgaria and Zambia, situating these stories within the wider context of Cold War rhetoric and superpower rivalry. Here Ghodsee intervenes in the historiography of feminism, arguing against narratives that either cast women working within socialist state-sponsored organizations as political dupes of their male compatriots, or that view African women

merely as passive victims of traditionalist cultures of patriarchal domination. Instead, Ghodsee discloses a detailed history of women's activism in groups like the Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (CBWM) and the United National Independence Party–Women's League (UNIP-WL) that offers a different story about feminists in these countries. Ghodsee documents how they struggled for, and achieved, real gains for women in the realms of employment, education and healthcare even while laboring under ideological conditions that, as Ghodsee is careful to acknowledge, all too often essentialized women's reproductive roles as mothers and wives in the service of programs for economic modernization and nationalization.

Ghodsee also documents the long-standing connections between anti-feminism and anti-communism in US politics, arguing that the hegemony of liberalism has privileged independent women's groups as authentic, delegitimized state-sponsored bodies like the CBWM, and instilled reductive or paternalistic attitudes towards non-Western cultures of femininity and non-Western women's experience of them. Following Lila Abu-Lughod's query that asks whether Muslim women need saving, Ghodsee's history points to several female-led efforts in these countries. She cites Bulgaria's highly developed network of state-supported childcare centers, and the Zambian Intestate Succession Act of 1989, which granted protection for the economic rights of widows. Correctives such as these foreground the agency of women both in the developing world and the Eastern bloc, who worked not only as committed activists but as deft operatives navigating political systems that hindered the range of free expression and dissent available to women seeking to secure their share of post-revolutionary change.

The book's second half chronicles three UN World Conferences on Women—held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985)—where tensions flared between Western feminists led by the US delegation and an emergent coalition of delegates from the “second” and “third” worlds. Women from socialist and developing countries found common cause by asserting global political issues as central to addressing the roots of women's oppression. These efforts culminated in the School for Knowledge, Solidarity, and Friendship (1980) in Sofia, that brought women from Asia and Africa for a forty-day course designed to enable reciprocal exchanges and encourage global solidarity. The Bulgarians provided practical lessons in activist training, and lectured on the benefits of socialism, while the visitors educated their hosts on the particular conditions and issues facing women in their countries. At the UN World Conferences, this coalition of women criticized US foreign policy, denounced the treatment of Palestinians, and condemned the West's support for the brutal racist regime of apartheid.

Western leaders charged the coalition with hijacking the conferences for political purposes, painting them as puppets of the Soviet propaganda machine and lobbying instead for a focus on specifically “women's issues” like sexism and patriarchy. Meanwhile the women from socialist countries dismissed this exclusive focus on gender as bourgeois. In the process, these women became embroiled in the high-profile propaganda battles of the Cold War. As such, despite Ghodsee's counter-history, one might also construe initiatives like the School for Solidarity as a form of Soviet soft-imperialism by proxy, which used Bulgaria's reputation for women's activism to obtain access to trade and natural resources in the developing world. Nevertheless, as Ghodsee points out, superpower rivalry did open a valuable political “third space” where women from non-aligned countries could stake a position that resisted Western imperialism by looking to alternative models of state provision embodied by the socialist East.

Ghodsee's harshest critics might accuse her of eliding the crimes perpetrated under Eastern socialist regimes and over-emphasizing their value as visionary social experiments. While she certainly makes no apologies for the "crimes of communism," Ghodsee also spends little time dwelling on them. Ghodsee's focus is on the tangible material benefits and opportunities that governments offered women living in the formerly socialist world. Calling attention to the precarious condition of archival evidence in countries like Bulgaria and Zambia, Ghodsee is mindful of reliance on firsthand testimony and the attendant "perils of oral history" (217). Ghodsee acknowledges these limitations throughout the text, countering that while some bias may be inevitable, these women's stories still deserve to be heard in an effort to balance the scales with respect to the mass of historical bias that exists within the well-funded archival infrastructure of the West. Ghodsee makes a compelling case. For instance, the "crimes of capitalism" never stopped anyone from lauding the political freedoms garnered under Western democracy, nor should they. Likewise, we ought to acknowledge the contradictions and complexities of the formerly socialist world, rather than shallowly disregarding it as a monolith of un-freedom. *Second World, Second Sex* challenges the conventional wisdom of three-wave feminist history by documenting the critical interventions made by these women in service of a vision of women's equality that was always already intersectional, and that refused to separate women's issues from questions of neo-colonialism, racism, and economic re-distribution. Ghodsee's book offers a helpful and instructive reminder of socialist feminism's rich and global history of organization and action, a history that was created and fought for in large part by alliances of women from non-aligned and socialist countries during the Cold War, and whose memory is all too often erased from Western histories of the women's movement during the "American century."

Author Information

Steven Gotzler

Steven Gotzler is a Ph.D. Candidate in Literary and Cultural Studies at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA. His research explores the intersections of intellectual cultures, labor, and literature during the 20th century. His work has been published in *The Los Angeles Review of Books* on Richard Hoggart and the politics of working-class studies. His dissertation, "The Uses of Culture: Intellectual Labor and the Sources of Cultural Studies in Britain and America, 1945-1964" offers an alternative critical history of the emergence of cultural studies in postwar Britain, turning to sources in Anglophone fiction, the visual arts, and North American social science

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Review of *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance* by Robert McRuer (NYU Press)

by Caroline Alphin | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT In his new book *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*, Robert McRuer offers his notion of "crip time" as an analytic through which we may critique the spatio-temporalities of austerity, late capitalism, and the cultural logic of neoliberalism. McRuer's position is that disability is at the core of a global politics of austerity and of neoliberalism. What does it mean that disability is central to a global politics of austerity? For McRuer, it means that thinking about austerity through "crip time" can highlight an ongoing politics of representation of disability. That is, neoliberalism actively produces certain ways of being disabled that are conducive to its continued operation. But, "crip time" points to the ways in which this politics of representation does not fully capture disability. Disability exceeds austerity and neoliberalism. *Crip Times*, then, offers a critical examination of how disability is represented within the cultural logic of neoliberalism. At the same time, McRuer cautions against, as some past projects in disability and queer theory have done, fully rejecting or embracing the politics of identity, representation, and rights.

KEYWORDS austerity, disability, disability studies, globalization, neoliberalism, resistance

Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance. By Robert McRuer. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 233 pp. (hardcover) ISBN: 9781479826315. US List: \$89 (paperback) ISBN: 9781479874156. US List: \$30.

In his new book *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*, Robert McRuer offers his notion of "crip time" as an analytic through which to critique the spatio-temporalities of austerity, late capitalism, and the cultural logic of neoliberalism. McRuer's position is that disability is at the core of a global politics of austerity and of neoliberalism. What does it mean that disability is central to a global politics of austerity? For McRuer, it means that thinking about austerity through "crip time" can highlight an ongoing politics of representation of disability. That is, neoliberalism actively produces certain ways of being disabled that are conducive to its continued operation. But, "crip time" also points to the ways in which this politics of representation does not fully capture disability. Disability exceeds austerity and neoliberalism. *Crip Times*, then, offers a critical examination of how disability is represented within the cultural logic of neoliberalism. At the same time, McRuer cautions against, as some past projects in disability and queer theory have done, fully rejecting or embracing the politics of identity, representation, and rights.

The central argument of *Crip Times* is that the construction and implementation of austerity as a policy and as a material reality is dependent upon certain representations and materializations of disability. Furthermore, McRuer argues that this co-productive

relationship between austerity and disability has, thus far, been undertheorized. Thus, *Crip Times* offers a rich theorization of the ways in which disability is central to a global politics of austerity. Austerity privileges a subject that is able-bodied and autonomous. The subjects of austerity can be held responsible for all of their choices and are presumed to deserve its harsh and precarious policies (including budget cuts, risk assumption, poor health conditions, flexible work, and later retirement, etc.), if they fail to compete. McRuer shows that disability and the disabled function as a way for a neoliberal state to justify austerity measures. That is, by using anti-disability rhetoric, such as characterizing individuals who ask for help as "scroungers," "spongers," and "shirkers," or by embracing David Cameron's "Broken Britain" or Margaret Thatcher's rhetoric of aspiration, neoliberalism makes clear that economic and social problems are individual and not systemic.

Through his focus on the United Kingdom, in particular on the Cameron years, McRuer makes strange, or—in his words—*crips* the ways in which disability is generally defined in disability studies, the media, and the state. The individuals that are understood to be scroungers, spongers, and shirkers, while not immediately intelligible as disabled, as McRuer argues, have in many ways been disabled by austerity measures. Or they are understood as innately inferior because of their failure to compete successfully in a market space, and thus they are represented as disabled. McRuer engages past and current work in queer and disability theory—including J. Jack Halberstam, Julie Livingston, Jasbir K. Puar, Alison Kafer, Kevin Floyd, Lisa Duggan, and Anne Finger—drawing from their denaturalization of able-bodied and heteronormative discourses, and from their theorizations of alternative political and economic imaginings of capitalism and neoliberalism. McRuer correspondingly offers a "crip" reading of disability within the cultural logic of neoliberalism across four chapters, each focusing on disability, and each centered around one of the following key concepts: dispossession, resistance, displacement, and aspiration.

Each chapter cripes one of these key concepts by breaking it down, twisting it, or defamiliarizing it. For example, in Chapter 1, McRuer characterizes what neoliberalism does with and to disability as an "austerity of representation." He suggests that modes of neoliberal dispossession, such as stealing and remaking queer as well as disabled identities, can be counter-posed against a critically crip dispossession that may resist austerity. An "austerity of representation" refers to the ways in which neoliberalism produces and allows for certain representations of disability, such as inspiration-porn, in order to hide the negative effects of certain policies and to detract attention away from activism. McRuer focuses in particular on "This Is What Disability Looks Like," an activist campaign that, for McRuer, offers a prime example of critically crip dispossession through its multivalent, excessive, and explicit or "pornographic" images of people with disabilities. It is in this campaign's "potentiality and sociality" that "This Is What Disability Looks Like" offers us a critically crip dispossession. Put differently, the future and present potential of "This Is What Disability Looks Like" to resist deadened representations of disability cannot be fully foreclosed by an austerity of representation. In each chapter that follows, McRuer engages in textual analyses of dominant neoliberal representations of disability and "emergent activist and artistic languages" (49). Moving back and forth between dominant neoliberal representations and these micro-level modes of resistance, McRuer shows that "emergent activist and artistic languages" (49) function, in part, by moving with and against neoliberalism's austerity of representation.

Part of the strength of this book is its demonstration of how crippling disability, austerity, and resistance makes it more difficult for neoliberalism to perpetuate itself. In other words, McRuer shows that neoliberalism, in part, functions through its ability to naturalize itself, to make it seem like it has always been the dominant social and cultural system. Neoliberalism is especially good at absorbing potential threats, including radical political and ontological forces. *Crip Times* does in the end deal with the current harsh times of neoliberalism and its austerity measures by considering the significance of resistance, and its contemporary forms. For readers familiar with McRuer's contributions to queer disability studies, the arguments presented in *Crip Times* fit nicely within his crip theory, as this text expands upon the interdisciplinary and intersectional methods of examining disability, ability, and culture that he has developed in previous works. *Crip Times* is an important contribution to the field because it offers a powerful corrective to the malaise of capitalist realism. While its usefulness extends beyond one particular discipline, scholars and activists in interdisciplinary programs, women and gender studies programs, political theory, and English will find it particularly useful.

Author Information

Caroline Alphin

Caroline Alphin is an Instructor in the Department of English at Radford University. She received her doctorate in ASPECT: The Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought, an interdisciplinary program at Virginia Tech. Her recent publications have appeared in journals like *Theory and Event* and *SPECTRA*. Her research interests include accelerationism, American neoliberalism, the everyday practices of neoliberal subjects, and critiques of intensity and resilience.

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Review of *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* by Manu Karuka (University of California Press)

by Julia H. Lee | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* by Manu Karuka suggests that the Transcontinental Railroad is a useful lens through which to view issues relating continental imperialism, countersovereignty, and capitalist modes of production.

KEYWORDS: Chinese American, indigenous peoples, labor, nation, sovereignty, Transcontinental Railroad, United States

Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad. By Manu Karuka. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019, pp. 297 (paper). ISBN 978-0-520-29664-0. US List \$29.95

Manu Karuka calls the methodology that undergirds his important book *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* something "akin to meditation . . . a practice of liberation" (xv). Challenging the rhetoric of so much academic scholarship that uncomplicatedly privileges the idea that historical inquiry is about the "discovery" of some heretofore unknown "fact," "object," or "text" that has resided untouched in an archive and will surely provide a key to unlocking the experiences of marginalized, excluded, and violated racial communities, Karuka provides a method that simultaneously relies upon and questions alternative frames. It is not surprising then that within this longer study of the relationship between settler colonialism and racial capitalism there is a long disquisition on the place and function of rumor in the historical archive. The kind of intense positivist desire for Truth—what Karuka calls the "doctrine of discovery," and which Karuka particularly resists—pervades the work on the Transcontinental Railroad, perhaps because there are, as Karuka himself notes, library shelves groaning with the weight of studies/monographs looking to "recover" that which the archive was never constructed or meant to acknowledge or preserve.

The Transcontinental Railroad offers a lens through which Karuka can explore three interrelated issues, which are briefly laid out in the book's introduction. The first is the continental imperialism that is the foundation of the United States as a nation. The fiction of national sovereignty also interacts with Karuka's conception of countersovereignty, in which a recognition on the part of the United States to "prior and ongoing" Indigenous claims of sovereignty over territory "provides a substructure to stabilize U.S. property

claims" (xii). It is this belatedness in relation to Native claims that characterizes US countersovereignty and that contributes to the anxiety that US sovereignty is always simultaneously unfinished and in crisis. The third issue that Karuka covers is that of *modes of relationship*, which is a way of talking about capitalism itself as a historically contingent form that produced certain kinds of relationships. These three themes are important to *Empire's Tracks* because they move away from the dominant narrative of the Transcontinental Railroad that tends to emphasize the competitive nature of the endeavor, the "linearity of its trajectory" that paints "capitalism as a coherent and discrete system" (xiii).

Karuka's attempts to rethink historical methodology are particularly prevalent in the organization of *Empire's Tracks*. The book contains nine chapters and an epilogue. The first two chapters of the book explore its central concepts of countersovereignty and modes of relationship. The last two chapters comprise theoretical explorations of concepts such as "shareholder whiteness" (a new form of white supremacy enabled by the railroad) and the convergence of Lenin's theory of imperialism with Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis on the frontier. The five chapters that are sandwiched between these introductory and concluding theoretical chapters are historical in their orientation, charting the history of railroad colonialism across the Americas. These chapters represent the heart of the book and theorize core ideas about the critique of political economy through the histories of colonized peoples. To my mind these chapters most fully articulate Karuka's theories regarding the railroad's function: as a "phantom subject" through which capitalism "appears as multiply refracted" (xiv). Particularly useful is the chapter "Railroad Colonialism," which highlights how the railroad was not the expression of a uniquely American ideal but has been part of a global "infrastructure of reaction" undertaken by colonialist forces in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Australia (40). Railroads were instrumental in campaigns of military conquest and enabled the expansion of bureaucracy which was seeking ways to further justify the occupation of Indigenous lands. (As an aside, the preponderance of former Union and Confederate officers who then went on to work on the railroad in official capacities after the Civil War's conclusion—as surveyors, photographers, cartographers, and the like—speaks to the intimate connection between the railroad as infrastructure and the railroad as colonizing tool in the nation's interior and west.) The government's granting of lands to railroad companies transformed these entities into "key instruments of the war-finance nexus," which in turn "facilitated the growth of finance capital" not only in the US but globally (46). This is the point that Karuka returns to at various points throughout the study: the railroads expanded and refined racial capitalism just as surely as nineteenth-century capital financed the railroad in the first place.

Karuka insists that his book is not one interested in the "recovery" of experiences of indigenous or Chinese subjects; he writes that the "historian crafting narrative through the prose of countersovereignty will remain on frustrated terrain . . . [such narratives] can find no proper resolution, only endless deferrals" (19). But I would contend that the absence of resolution characterizes all text, regardless of the perspective from which it is being written; the key then is to identify the extent to which texts foreground these "endless deferrals" or the extent to which they claim that these deferrals are anything but. While respecting Karuka's refusal to "prove" the interiority of native and Chinese experiences, I would nevertheless have welcomed the chance to read about these deferred moments and Karuka's take on them. Nevertheless, *Empire's Tracks* powerfully and effectively portrays how US countersovereignty uses the railroad to stop the unraveling of its own claims to land and space through an unceasing campaign of extirpation and violence. Its

contributions to critiques of settler colonialism and racial capitalism are substantial and are sure to be influential in years to come.

Author Information

Julia H. Lee

Julia H. Lee is associate professor of Asian American Studies at the University of California at Irvine. She is the author of *Interracial Encounters: Reciprocal Representations in African and Asian American Literatures, 1896–1937* (New York University Press, 2010) and *Understanding Maxine Hong Kingston* (University of South Carolina Press, 2016). Her book-in-progress, *The Racial Railroad*, examines the prevalence of the train as a setting for scenes of racial formation and conflict in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American cultural texts. She teaches courses on a variety of subjects including the Asian American *bildungsroman*, contemporary Asian American fiction, race and urban space, Asian American women, and critical race studies.

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Review of *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* by Sylvia Chan-Malik (NYU Press)

by Najwa Mayer | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT Sylvia Chan-Malik's *Being Muslim* argues that Muslim women of color in the United States have historically engaged with Islam as concurrent rejoinders to systemic racism and those national and cultural patriarchies directed against them. Chan-Malik centers the divergent experiences and insurgent faith practices of women of color, particularly African American women, within the fundamental character of Islam in the 20th and 21st US. Through the juxtaposition of multiple methodologies—archival, discursive, affective, and oral historical—Chan-Malik follows her subjects' complex lives rather than inserting them within expedient political or academic discourses that often subsume the intersectional politics of US women in Islam.

KEYWORDS African American studies, comparative race studies, critical Muslim studies, cultural history, media studies, women's studies

Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam. By Sylvia Chan-Malik. New York: New York University Press, 2018, 288 pp. (paperback). ISBN 9781479823420. US List: \$29.00.

Sylvia Chan-Malik's *Being Muslim* examines methodologically what cannot be forgotten historically: the fundamental character of Islam in the United States was shaped by African American people and the cultural politics of Blackness. Centralizing the experiences of women of color in American Islam, and Black women's legacies in particular, Chan-Malik examines how their "being Muslim" actively forms—intellectually, emotionally, and bodily—at the intersections of specific race contexts, gendered insecurities, religious ideas, and lived political structures. Chan-Malik argues that US Muslim women of color have historically engaged with Islam as concurrent rejoinders to systemic racism and national/cultural patriarchies through both embodied and social acts of faith and politics. Her sources draw on media texts, historical archives, and personal interviews.

Chan-Malik begins with a robust introduction to her theoretical apparatuses. First, we glean from the opening sentences that Muslim being/being Muslim are both ontological and performative, as registers of identity and creativity, politics and practice. Second, Chan-Malik argues that multiple feminisms—particularly, black feminism, womanism, and women of color/third world feminism—are central to narrating a history of American Islam as well as changing conceptions of US-based Muslim feminism today. Third, any representational and lived histories of Islam in the US must attend to its "racial-religious" formations, especially given how entangled American imaginations of and policies toward Islam are with state surveillance and militarism. She discursively links Islam in the US to

domestic Black Muslim rebellion before the 1970s and to transnational Muslim fundamentalism after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Finally, Chan-Malik turns all-too-familiar tropes of “radical Muslim” cultural insurgency on their heads by affirming the diverse agencies of Islam in the US, particularly for women of color, as practices of “affective insurgencies.” She defines “affective insurgency” as a persistent “againstness” toward white Anglo-Saxon Protestant normativity.

Adding to ontological, performative, and discursive readings, affect is important for Chan-Malik, especially as it relates the body to the world through power-laden encounters that negotiate everyday acts. She builds her “affective insurgency” not through the expected social-structural registers of the Raymond Williams school of cultural theory (i.e. affect as *emergent* social relations). Rather, notions of lived religion (e.g. Sherman Jackson and Carolyn Moxley Rouse’s works on African American Islam) as well as a determined focus on “modes of embodiment” (23) and “continual againstness” (18) (e.g. Sara Ahmed’s work on feminism, embodiment, and emotion) form the affective registers through which insurgent acts of faith and politics grapple with uneven systems of power. Chan-Malik convincingly demonstrates the conceptual value of “affective insurgency” to studies of women’s Islamic practice in liberal secular western states, where Muslim public archives and performances may be historically limited.

In chapter 1, Chan-Malik works from a 1923 photograph of four African American Muslim women in the Ahmadiyya Movement, the earliest major US Muslim organization. Attuned to the politics of black working-class women’s bodies, she reconstructs the historical realities and imagined visions of a particularly situated Black Muslim womanhood in the US as “insurgently” produced against the lived experiences of racial violence, class insecurities, patriarchal authorities, and Black Christian dominances that organized the 1920s Chicago landscape. Chan-Malik’s methodology is unexpectedly speculative, using cultural analysis (like singer Bessie Smith’s 1923 forlorn “Chicago Bound Blues”) to imagine what these un-historicized Black women experienced and saw—“a visual reversal of their image” (44). Reminiscent of Saidiya Hartman’s work, a critical storytelling approach excises the felt insecurities of structural racism and patriarchy that likely influenced these women’s interests in the egalitarian ideologies of Ahmadi Muslims. For scholars of early US Muslim histories, this model of cultural study can begin to approximate those experiences of race, gender, class, and sexuality in American Islam that asymmetries of power, culture, and record have silenced.

In chapters 2 and 3, Chan-Malik demonstrates how Black women in the Civil Rights era channeled Islam affectively as a “safe harbor” against their lived racial and gendered insecurities. First, using mainstream media representations of the Nation of Islam (NOI) in the 1950s–1960s, she focuses on Black Muslim women’s “insurgent domesticity.” Building from Debra Majeed’s theorization of “Muslim womanism,” Chan-Malik argues that NOI women’s domestic work is determinedly rendered as political work within Civil Rights and Cold War nationalist discourses that modeled the Black patriarchal family as moral and respectable. Next, using the examples of Betty Shabazz, wife of Civil Rights leader Malcolm X, and Dakota Staton, former wife of jazz trumpeter Talib Dawud, Chan-Malik reveals how they conceived of their marriages as practices of their faith—which also engendered their public displays of Black womanism in racial uplift and family security.

In chapter 4, Chan-Malik uses Leila Ahmed’s colonial “discourse of the veil” to consider a post-1970s “US discourse of the veil.” Notably, Chan-Malik’s focus is not on longer histories of the Orientalized veil (which, as scholars have shown, traveled with white

imperialism globally including through the movements and discourses of North American and European white women well-before the 1970s). Instead, she is interested in how this post-1970s veil discourse revived earlier stereotypes through both American media coverage of Iranian women's movements during the nation's 1979 Islamic Revolution and second wave feminists' internationalist rhetoric—particularly at the elision of US Black Muslim women's contributions to Islam. In pursuing solidarity with Iranian women, white upper-middle class feminists reproduced narratives of exceptionalist American feminism abroad while disregarding their own heavily critiqued exclusions of women of color and working class feminisms. What became most obfuscated in this exoticized discourse were the agencies of Black Muslim women within the US who practiced Islam as part of their racial-gendered insurgencies. These presences still linger in contemporary cultural repertoire, however, as Chan-Malik reminds us how recent gendered-racialized stereotypes of Islam in the US, especially through "radical men" and "victimized women," rely heavily on representations of rebellious Black Muslims in the US, especially the NOI.

Chan-Malik's methodology shifts significantly in chapter 5 and the conclusion, where she presents accounts of five living US Muslim women identified as Arab, Latina, South Asian, and African American. Rather than cultural analyses or speculative histories, personal interviews supplement biographical sketches of figures whose Muslim feminisms diversely bridge their racial-gendered experiences, faith practices, and social reform work. While the author's adept theorizations of affect are less applied to the oral historical texts, there is something humble and necessary about the different praxis Chan-Malik pursues. She begins chapter 5 with a poetic reference to "women's language" and an apparent quest to hear the voices of current US Muslim feminisms, which she argues are antiracist, gender-justice oriented legacies of earlier Black Muslim women's insurgencies. While the multivocality of these chapters is certainly instructive for a study that centers intersectionalities of Muslim-being, Chan-Malik's enthusiastic audience may read here the preludes to another book on contemporary Muslim feminisms.

Chan-Malik's *Being Muslim* offers rich approaches for the study of Muslim women of color, deftly layering critical feminist theories, cultural history, religious studies, and comparative race studies. The juxtaposition of multiple methodologies—archival, discursive, affective, oral historical—also meets the challenge that the author sets out: to narrate alongside the divergent experiences of women's Muslim-being. Chan-Malik writes, too, through a rigorous awareness of the social production of knowledge; that is, she writes with her subjects—following their complex lives—rather than inserting them within expedient political or academic discourses that often subsume the differences of women of color in American Islam. From such an interdisciplinary framework, *Being Muslim* does what all good scholarship should: it thinks generatively with its colleagues; Chan-Malik is in conversation with diverse practitioners of Muslim/Islamic Studies, especially in relation to gender and race, such as Amina Wadud, Debra Majeed, Zareena Grewal, and Junaid Rana. And, it invites generously future scholarship to think precisely about the politics that craft women's contributions to a "living Islam" (borrowing, alongside Chan-Malik, from Wadud). For instance, for this scholar, Chan-Malik's methodology invites queer approaches, questions of shifting racial tensions, as well as the active archives of contemporary popular cultures, where insurgent epistemologies of Muslim-being are yet emerging.

Author Information

Najwa Mayer

Najwa Mayer is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at Yale University. Her dissertation and first book manuscript, *Muslim Americana*, considers the global mobilization of "Muslim American" identities via popular visual and performance cultures through theorizations of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, and liberalism in the 21st century United States. She is a founding member of the North Eastern Public Humanities Consortium (nep) and has contributed to the curation of modern and contemporary work by Arab and South Asian artists in the Yale University Art Gallery as well as the Whitney Humanities Center.

[View all of Najwa Mayer's articles.](#)

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Review of *Prison Land: Mapping Carceral Power Across Neoliberal America* by Brett Story (University of Minnesota Press)

by Marcia Klotz | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT Brett Story's *Prison Land: Mapping Carceral Power Across Neoliberal America* offers a timely reflection on the role of mass incarceration in remaking the neoliberal contours of contemporary U.S. culture. Working within the traditions of critical prison studies and structural critiques of neoliberalism, Story offers detailed portraits of a number of landscapes shaped by the logic of mass incarceration. She persuasively argues that the work of prison abolitionism must also encompass the deeper structural projects of abolishing racism and other injustices in society at large. This book is best read alongside the documentary, *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes* (2016), by the same author.

KEYWORDS abolitionism, neoliberalism, prison studies, United States

Prison Land: Mapping Carceral Power across Neoliberal America. By Brett Story. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA; London, UK: University of Minnesota Press, 2019, 219 pp. ISBN 9788-1-5179-0688-7, paperback. US List: \$19.95.

As a trained geographer, Brett Story has written a book about how mass incarceration remakes space in the United States. It's not about the space of the *prison* per se, but rather, all of the other spaces around it and to which it is linked, through contiguous economies, flows of bodies, and disciplinary modes of logic. *Prison Land* works like a giant jigsaw puzzle that is only two-thirds complete, with the main focus of the image—the prison towers in the middle of the frame—still unfinished. Rather than discussing the world inside the prison itself, the reader is treated to a series of brilliantly drawn and carefully chosen vignettes that illustrate how mass incarceration remakes its world. By the end of the book, we start to see the language and the logic of the prison everywhere—in the surveillance apparatus at the workplace, in educational spaces and parks, in community centers and churches. Mass incarceration corrupts the very air we breathe under neoliberalism in the United States. If we are to devote ourselves to the hard work of abolitionism—and Story tirelessly and unflinchingly challenges us to do so—that project will not stop at the prison gates.

The first two chapters focus on gentrification. One treats the skyrocketing values of office space in downtown Detroit, where the devastation wrought by the mortgage scams of 2007–2009 have resulted in massive foreclosures. Story documents the efforts that went into constructing urban spaces as “blighted” and “abandoned” in order to make them available for the profitable development of skyscraper office complexes and urban hipster markets. That work includes governmental policies (e.g., cutting off drinking water from

homes, defunding schools, etc.), “broken-windows” policing strategies, and “revitalization” funds used to raze condemned properties. Chapter 2 focuses on the use of “urban frontier” discourse in Brownsville, a Brooklyn neighborhood facing gentrification, in order to constitute residents as disposable, hence dispossessable. Here the first section of interlocking puzzle pieces begins to emerge: those prison walls cannot be taken down without simultaneously attacking the “accumulation by dispossession” strategies that make gentrification possible.

But prison land, the terrain remade by incarceration regimes, takes other forms as well. The third chapter focuses on coal country in Appalachia, a region where mountaintop removal has destroyed soil productivity and poisoned water sources. In desperately poor regions like these, prisons offer the only employment opportunities for local communities. Story interviews a number of local residents, whose hopes for new prison construction revolve around promised jobs, not a punitive ideology toward “criminals.” Carceral logic emerges here as a consequence of decades of environmental degradation by an industry that has ruthlessly exploited both land and people. Story’s point here is that a politics of punishment *follows* the impoverishment that recasts prison economies as a last-ditch, messianic hope; it does not lead the way.

The fourth vignette moves to an ungrounded, moving space: the bus that takes family members—mostly women and children—back and forth from New York City to Attica. Story describes the interior of this bus as a secondary kind of carceral space, where the connection and love that binds family and friends to those living in cages becomes a mode of punishment, stretching those who are already overextended (financially, emotionally, and physically) to the breaking point.

In later chapters, Story discusses how strategies of surveillance and behavioral control bleed outward from the prison to contaminate and remake the spaces outside. She takes issue here with many of the strategies touted by liberals who want to reduce the prison population by releasing—though still surveilling—those individuals deemed “non-threatening” to the public through policies she decries as “transcarceration” strategies. One example is a “youth court,” justified as an alternative to prison, that subjects young, racialized people to the same kinds of censure and control they might experience inside—but now in a “community-based” format. Many reentry programs follow a similar logic. Such measures, which Story (quoting Ruth Wilson Gilmore, with whose work she is constantly in dialogue) calls “nonreformist reform,” ultimately recriminalize those newly released, extending the prison space ever outward until it seems that no part of the world lies beyond its reach. Story argues that such programs focus on the personal responsibility or shortcomings of the individual, rather than interrogating the structural injustices that gave rise to the demand for incarceration in the first place.

This is where her book gave me pause. For those of us who volunteer in prisons or work with those recently released, I am not clear how Story’s structural approach might be useful in our personal interactions with those attempting to make a meaningful life for themselves on the outside. The fault, we can say, is not yours, but lies with a society built around putting people in cages in the first place. While I am convinced that is true, it may offer little comfort to those for whom revolutionary change is not coming quickly enough.

That said, not only is Story an insightful geographer, theorist, and activist; she is also a gifted filmmaker. This book serves as a companion text to *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes*, a documentary thematizing many of the same issues, beautifully shot by

photographer Maya Bankovic and released in 2016 (available through iTunes and Kanopy). The film is aesthetically ambitious, interweaving its narrative with lyrical, languid shots of coal trains and bus journeys, thereby locating the viewer in the sticky temporality of the dispossessed. The two texts are best read / viewed together. Both the film and the book showcase landscapes not represented in the other, but there is an elucidating overlap between them, too. Interviews with Detroit boosterists or poor Appalachian residents hoping for prison jobs are respectful, and Story's deep sympathy for those caught up in the system prevents simplistic vilification of those who stand to benefit from the making of prison land. The problem she identifies is structural, and the abolitionist politics for which she advocates must be, as well.

Author Information

Marcia Klotz

Marcia Klotz is an Assistant Professor of English and Gender & Women's Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson. She is also director of the Prison Education Project, which coordinates volunteers from the University of Arizona and the local community to bring higher education classes to the Tucson State Prison Complex. She is interested in the intersection of coercive power structures and neoliberal economics, and is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Forgive Us Our Debts: Economic Theology in the Age of Finance Capital*.

[View all of Marcia Klotz's articles.](#)

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Review of *Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology* by Adrienne Mayor (Princeton University Press)

by Michael Buozis | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT In *God and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology*, Adrienne Mayor opens up ancient history to new interpretations by adopting a rather capacious definition of technology, one that many scholars of the ancient world—according to Mayor—may reject out of hand. Focusing on biotechné, or artificial life, Mayor accepts any figure from the texts and artifacts of the ancient world which was “made, not born” as a technological creation. Mayor argues that ancient cultural constructions of technology were less about the inner workings of a black box (e.g., a giant metal robot) than about the imagining of such things existing in the first place. In nine chapters, Mayor recasts various myths and figures of the ancient Greek world in this new light. *Gods and Robots* serves as an important step in revealing how the idea of technology has functioned in ways both mythic and material from the beginning of recorded history.

KEYWORDS biotechnology, cultural history, Greek myth, technology

Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology. By Adrienne Mayor. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. 275 pp. (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-691-18351-0. US list: \$29.95.

In *God and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology*, Adrienne Mayor opens up ancient history to new interpretations by adopting a rather capacious definition of technology, one that many scholars of the ancient world—according to Mayor—may reject out of hand. Focusing on biotechné, or artificial life, Mayor accepts any figure from the texts and artifacts of the ancient world which was “made, not born” as a technological creation (1). Though many of Mayor’s subjects—such as Talos, a bronze automaton that defended Crete from outsiders—were made through divine processes unknown to humans, Mayor argues that ancient cultural constructions of technology were less about the inner workings of a black box (e.g., a giant metal robot) than about the imagining of such things existing in the first place. As Mayor writes, “Ideas about creating artificial life were thinkable long before technology made such enterprises possible. The myths reinforce the notion that imagination is the spirit that unites myth and science” (1). Yet such an interpretation of these ancient stories raises the question of whether it is not precisely the inscrutable nature of so many technologies that encourages us to, like the Titan Epimetheus, accept them into our lives and societies with little forethought.

Of course, the ancient Greeks could not have predicted the rise of the godlike techno-capitalists of the early twenty-first century, not to mention our relatively unbridled embrace of their freely-given technological wonders. Nonetheless, the idea that we might not so eagerly trust those more powerful than us is central to technological myths' resonances through the ages. In *Gods and Robots*, Mayor's new interpretation of many texts and artifacts of ancient mythologies and cultures opens up new ways of thinking about some very old cultural constructions of the relationship between technology and culture. As Mayor argues in the epilogue, technological wonder "might seem a uniquely modern response to the juggernaut of scientific progress in the age of technology" but an ambivalent fascination with technology "surfaced thousands of years ago in the ancient Greek world" (213).

In nine chapters, Mayor recasts various myths and figures of the ancient Greek world in this new light. The aforementioned myth of Talos represents an early expression of the idea that a sort of independent, if limited, form of life might be replicated through technology. Likewise, Medea luring Pelias into a "cauldron of rejuvenation" represents a forebearer of the "hope and horror [that] still coexist in modern Western reactions to 'playing god' with science" (42). Mayor also finds evidence for early prosthetic and augmentative technologies in Celtic and Norse mythology, calling the goddess Freyja an "organic cyborg" (68). Ancient "*techne*-pornography" can be traced back at least as far as the myth of Pasiphae, in which Daedalus—he of the wax wings and Minotaur—built what Mayor calls a "realistic, life-size sex toy" (71). Early philosophical writings on the subjectivity of automata, Mayor argues, presaged the complex work of more contemporary philosophers and ethicists of artificial intelligence. Ancient anxieties about how artificial images and beings could seem eerily lifelike find their contemporary analogy, here, in the phenomenon of the uncanny valley. Mayor finds some unnerving references to these myths in the contemporary world, such as TALOS, a "computerized exoskeleton" being developed by the U.S. military (138). Each of the chapters is illustrated with helpfully-placed reproductions of ancient art representing the myths and figures under discussion.

But as Mayor's overarching interpretation of the relationship between myth and technology suggests, *Gods and Robots* is more about ancient Greek imaginings of technology—or how "mechanical technology, evoked *sebas*, *thauma*, and *thambos* . . . awe, wonder, and astonishment" (102)—than it is about how technology has been wielded as a form of power, both in these stories and in the cultures in which these stories circulated. However, technology and myth do not act as mere vessels for the imagination. For instance, Pygmalion sculpted a sort of semi-living statue that pleased him in a way that "vulgar real women" could not (107). What does this story say about the ancient Greek world's understanding of who could claim technological power and how that power had been or ought to be wielded?

Among the many fascinating exegeses of ancient myths here, Mayor seems to acknowledge these questions about power and technology, noting, for instance, that "one of the essential motivations for the creation of machines and robots is economic" (152). Future work, building on Mayor's text, would explore this motivation further, as technology is both mythic and material, even in the context of these narratives. That said, *Gods and Robots* is an important step in revealing how technology has functioned in both ways from the beginning of recorded history.

Author Information

Michael Buozis

Michael Buozis is a visiting lecturer at Muhlenberg College and a doctoral candidate at Klein College of Media and Communication at Temple University. His research, which has been published in *Journalism*, *Journalism Studies*, *American Journalism*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, and *Convergence*, examines journalism, digital culture, and technology from a critical cultural studies perspective.

[View all of Michael Buozis's articles.](#)

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Review of *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* by Sabrina Strings (New York University Press)

by Meshell Sturgis | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT In *Fearing the Black Body*, Sabrina Strings argues that the origins of present day fat phobia stem from moral and scientific shifts of the Enlightenment period. Affected by a history of racial slavery in America and other parts of the world, the religious, medical, philosophical, and aesthetic opinions of elite white men shaped how the white woman's body became representative of nationhood through its ascriptions as morally right in its svelte figure. The black woman's body, ostensibly the complete opposite (i.e., obese and worthy of denigration), consequently became the basis for the favored white woman's essentialized attributes.

KEYWORDS biopolitics, Blackness, bodies

Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia. By Sabrina Strings. New York: New York University Press, 2019, 304 pp. (hardcover) ISBN: 9781479819805. US List: \$89.

Sabrina Strings's monograph, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, contributes a much-needed historiographic intervention towards revealing and critiquing the embodied, biopolitical implications of race, as it operates in tandem with gender and sexuality, among other things. The book unravels a generative critique of fatphobia and of present-day body ideals suffused with pro-thin and anti-fat dispositions, by tracking rhetorical deployments of race which, as a symbol, has historically functioned as a conduit for such sentiments. Strings's project traces the "key figures . . . as well as the sociocultural and political factors" that supported the tethering of racism to the body and contributed to contemporary size biases (5–6). Plaiting together accounts of those who rose to power through various institutions of influence, Strings depicts the circumstances that not only fostered hegemonic values about bodily appearance but shaped how such standards were received by the general public.

With a sustained focus on the black woman's body, Strings describes the racial scientific rhetorics that have infused various popular texts over time, from portraiture by late European Renaissance artists like Albrecht Dürer and Raphael and their neoclassical theorist counterparts to women's magazines from the Age of Reform like *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of how the upper class differentiates themselves from the lower classes and Michel Foucault's postulate that health management is biopolitical, Strings not only identifies the United States as the central locale of anti-fat bias but also illuminates the syncopations through which art, philosophy, medicine, and religion combined to produce pro-thin biases in the twentieth

century (7–8). As a sociologist who studies race, gender, and embodiment at the intersection of medicine and media, Strings uses conjunctural analysis to analyze how the black woman's body first became tethered to fatness as part of the national endeavor of instantiating whiteness and making it appear supreme.

Split into three parts, the book begins by acknowledging that “plump” women's bodies were desirable in the sixteenth century, or at the least, ambivalence prevailed in conceptions about the “othered” African body. However, the seventeenth century marks a shift wherein “a philosopher's slim ideal” is born, as “the fat male body became a sign of poor moral character and mental incapacity” (9). In the second part, Strings describes how, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “body size became a sign of race, morality, and national identity” in “the context of religious health reform movements and the massive immigration of Irish racial Others” (10). New eugenic discourses of inter- and intra-racial mixing emerged. Finally, the last part of the book ties together late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medical opinions on the proper body size to the current “so-called obesity epidemic” (11).

Through meticulous biographies of highbrow influencers like George Cheyne, “an eighteenth-century medical man” (100) and Elizabeth Bisland, a nineteenth-century writer and editor of *Cosmopolitan*, Strings traces the origin of “a fetish for svelteness and a phobia about fatness,” attributing this lived reality to the historic “rise of the transatlantic slave trade and the Spread of Protestantism” (6). Investigating how American popular medicine has changed from fearing the “meagerness of the physiques of (elite white) women” to viewing “fatness, especially among black women, as the greater threat to public health” in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Strings examines not just how fatness was deemed immoral and became associated with blackness, but also how “slenderness, especially among women, was both aesthetically preferable and a sign of national identity” (4–5). Using historical narrative and process-tracing methods, Strings paints a picture of how the black woman and her body has come to be seen in a variety of ways, from “well-proportioned and plump” (17) to “greedy, excessive” (84), and essentially “immoral and unhealthy” (125). Many prominent American figures are implicated as Strings acknowledges the participation of Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Kellogg in producing “fear of the black body,” which was “integral to the creation of the slender aesthetic among fashionable white Americans” (212).

Some might think that with all the mentioning of “fleshiness,” (Strings, 2019, 31) Hortense Spillers's “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book” would be a primary source.¹ Others may wonder how such a project could convene without direct response to Stephanie M. H. Camp's call for research on “ideas about beauty and ugliness” that “remain entangled with the invention and ongoing reinvention of race itself,” noting that “whether in the service of racism or antiracism, beauty was and is a constitutive element of the meaning of race in the United States.”² However, Strings's work adds “a much-needed intersectional component to the analysis of the development of fat phobia and the slender aesthetic, revealing race to be the missing element in many of these analyses” (212). In fact, the omissions of the works of Spillers and Camp only testify to Strings's laser focus on past contours of black embodiment with regards to attitudes about body size specifically.

Personally, I found reading *Fearing the Black Body* pure pleasure while sitting alone at restaurants. One day, while reading the book and nibbling on french fries, I felt especially affirmed in my gut feeling regarding an incident just the day before when a student had

assumed I was not the yoga instructor of the class he had shown up to take. Equipped with the book's lens, I understand that my racialized body vis-à-vis gender, size, and skin color is but a vehicle in the social imaginary. The racism I experience in the yoga studio has little to do with what I actually do, the size of my yoga pants, or the particular curves of my body. Instead, it has everything to do with the insidious racism that is rooted in the landscape of imperial, colonial, anti-Black, patriarchal, and Christian history that governs our present-day relations.

While the argument of *Fearing the Black Body* reveals a thread in the tapestry of ways the body is tethered to race, it is nonetheless a relevant and entirely necessary contribution that could not have come at a better time. I look forward to reading more of Dr. Strings's work. She is a keen writer with a gift for revealing the latencies in American history using sharp critique, robust detail, incisive argumentation, and thought-provoking analysis.

Notes

1. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81. [↗](#)
2. Stephanie M. H. Camp, "Black is Beautiful: An American History," *The Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 3 (2015): 690. [↗](#)

Author Information

Meshell Sturgis

Meshell Sturgis is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington, where she critically studies representations of difference in visual culture and alternative media. She has a B.A. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a M.A. in Cultural Studies from The University of Washington - Bothell. She is currently a Research Assistant for the Center for Communication, Difference, and Equity and a resident of the Black Embodiment Studio.

[View all of Meshell Sturgis's articles.](#)

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Review of *Fire and Snow: Climate Fiction from the Inklings to Game of Thrones* by Marc DiPaolo (State University of New York Press)

by Alisa M. Schreibman | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT Marc DiPaolo's *Fire and Snow* engages with the burgeoning 'cli-fi' genre which speculates on climate change themes and corollary effects. Through close examination of such diverse works as Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games*, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, and "low-culture" films *Snowpiercer* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, DiPaolo both argues in favor of non-partisan collective action against climate change and explores broader public engagement with environmental themes. Primarily a survey text, *Fire and Snow* nevertheless provides considered analysis of the relationship between authors, producers, and consumers in the dissemination of cli-fi messaging in popular culture.

KEYWORDS cli-fi, climate, ecocriticism, fiction, film studies, literary studies, speculative fiction

Fire and Snow: Climate Fiction from the Inklings to Game of Thrones. By Marc DiPaolo. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018, 333 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978-1-4384-7045-0. US List: \$29.95.

With his most recent book, *Fire and Snow: Climate Fiction from the Inklings to Game of Thrones*, Marc DiPaolo joins Greta Thunberg in proclaiming, "No Planet B!" Of course DiPaolo's pitch has a more modest audience than the United Nations—scholars of literature and film, theologians, and philosophers—and he lacks legions of teenagers as his allies. But DiPaolo does marshal J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Margaret Atwood, Suzanne Collins, George R.R. Martin, and their cohort in making a powerful argument for non-partisan collective action against climate change. Instead of decades of climate science and rising sea levels, DiPaolo addresses the swelling volume of science fiction and fantasy dealing not with aliens and magic so much as pollution, melting ice caps, drought, and pandemics, or what is known as "cli fi."

DiPaolo, an assistant professor of English at Southwestern Oklahoma University, has published nine books and several edited volumes that survey terrain adjacent to his current work. In *Fire and Snow*, he expands the breadth of his subject matter, from pre-World War II British fantasy to contemporary American cli-fi, popular young adult and literary fiction, Hollywood film, and British television.

In DiPaolo's own words, *Fire and Snow* aims "to show how these popular franchises are recognized (or not recognized) by the broader public as climate fiction narratives offering

critical moral instruction on the urgency of conservation" (9). The book first argues, in the words of Margaret Atwood, that climate change is an *everything* issue; thus, cli-fi also explores issues of poverty, race, gender, sexuality, and religion. The book then follows I.Q. Hunter and Frederic Jameson in surveying popular works of "uneven quality" that may still offer "'little stabs of insight into . . . culture seething with repression and coming apart.'"1; however, DiPaolo also observes that Hollywood's focus on money-making action films leads to stripping literature of its cli-fi themes, producing instead films that *promote* violence, war, and exploitation.

DiPaolo thus engages his texts with a "marriage" of thematic criticism and ecocriticism, both deconstructionist modes of reader-response theory. Ecocriticism, especially strains enriched by ecofeminism, examines the relationship between text and physical environment, while thematic criticism permits grouping texts from disparate genres and media to examine the environmental theme (7). As DiPaolo acknowledges, this theoretical move can be at variance with the authors' intentions by putting meaning in the hands of the readers, but it is consistent with the overall project of examining how the "broader public" receives cli-fi themes in popular media.

The book is arranged into an introduction, eleven chapters, and an epilogue. Epigraphs from Leonard Peltier, *Game of Thrones*, and *Mockingjay* frame the argument, articulating climate change as a collective problem. DiPaolo's introduction on reclaiming enemy territory sets out the moral charge: fixing the environment requires an attitude change. The conclusion, which pits *Atlas Shrugged* against *Lord of the Rings*, asserts a solution in the homely ways of Tolkien's hobbits.

Chapters are grouped into interpretive chunks. The first three cover Christian stewardship and the legacy of Oxford's infamous Inklings literary group, notably Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Chapter 1 deals with the "cultural appropriation" of Tolkien and others by hawkish conservatives, covering the misuse of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey within texts like *Star Wars*. Chapter 2 revisits the oft-discussed Tolkien-Lewis friendship, focusing on their anti-fascism, and reads Tolkien's Middle-Earth as part of a "shared universe" with Lewis's space trilogy. Chapter 3 brings the Inklings into the present with *Doctor Who*, in which the Doctor is sometimes a Christ figure (Aslan), sometimes an angel (Gandalf), and always on the side of the trees.

The next two chapters cover the intersections of wealth, race, and climate change. Chapter 4 examines the Noah's ark solution: disaster capitalism and "magic lifeboats," or wishful-thinking technological solutions exclusively for the wealthy. Here, Mark Millar's 2012 joins *The West Wing* in a critique of Dominion theology, a strain of evangelical Christianity that believes humanity's role is to subdue rather than steward the earth. Exemplar texts for Chapter 5's discussion of race include Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan's *The Strain*, and Neill Blomkamp's *Elysium*.

Chapters 6–8 continue to examine intersectionality, but with a specific emphasis on dystopian post-apocalypse and the plausibility of revolt. In Chapter 6, DiPaolo tackles the Eden myth, the Fall, LeGuin's feminism, and St. Francis's Christian environmentalism. Chapter 7 explores the ecofeminist storytelling developed most thoroughly in the works of Margaret Atwood, in whose dystopias DiPaolo finds foreshadowing of current events, calling her a prophet. In Chapter 8, he addresses the outcomes of rebellion against dystopian regimes. While *Mad Max: Fury Road* shows a qualified success, *Snowpiercer*

depicts an utter failure. Umberto Eco's fourteen factors of Ur-fascism, or Eternal Fascism, provides the methodological background here.


Fire and Snow's final three chapters are prescriptive. In Chapter 9, DiPaolo reads Suzanne Collins as a liberal Catholic social justice warrior whose *Hunger Games* trilogy makes a subversive argument for radical, bottom-up empathy. Chapter 10 turns to *Star Trek* and *Game of Thrones* for examples of what DiPaolo calls (in an unfortunate stereotype-perpetuating phrase) "the Cowboy and Indian Alliance"—that is, uniting with historical enemies against the greater environmental threat. In the book's short concluding chapter, DiPaolo asks what comes next, likening the present to the then-unknown ending of the televised *Game of Thrones*. Here DiPaolo enlists Robert Crumb and Naomi Klein to emphasize the possibilities for collective action against an uncertain future.

With *Fire and Snow*, DiPaolo provides a remarkably cogent overview of this expanding genre. He is at his best when discussing Christian stewardship and radical empathy. Chapter 6, which juxtaposes Campbell's hero's journey as "the killer story" with Atwood's *MaddAdam* trilogy and St. Francis's *The Wolf of Gubbio* as "the life story" is especially strong (160–64). The book also treads new ground in Inklings-adjacent criticism, canvassing popular culture and dipping into *Game of Thrones* fan studies, to bolster his argument on radical empathy. The sheer scope of the book makes it a quintessential resource for newcomers to the field, while jargon-free analysis ensures it never sacrifices depth for breadth.

That said, *Fire and Snow* occasionally falls short of executing the social justice agendas set out in Chapters 4 and 5. Excepting Octavia Butler, the book largely ignores non-White authors and entirely overlooks N.K. Jemisin's three-in-a-row Hugo Award-winning *Inheritance Trilogy*. While demonstrating Tolkien's anti-fascism (*passim*) and explicit disavowal of anti-Semitism, the book relegates Tolkien's problematic stereotypically anti-Semitic characterization of his dwarves to a parenthetical (45, 39). And DiPaolo excoriates Peter Jackson for making "action movies" of Tolkien's cli-fi without acknowledging the movies' powerful emphases on moral character and the processing of historical grievances. Such oversights may stem from DiPaolo's breadth of coverage and reader-response methodology and detract little from an otherwise excellent book.

Climate-change deniers and alt-right conservatives will dislike DiPaolo's social justice agenda, but those recognizing the twin threats of environmental racism and climate change will find his work both erudite and engaging. A compelling anti-fascist argument for collective action against climate change by way of literary analysis, *Fire and Snow* is, ultimately, a book the Inklings would appreciate.

Notes

1. I.Q. Hunter, *British Trash Cinema* (2013), quoted in DiPaolo, *Fire and Snow*, 184) 

Author Information

Alisa M. Schreibman

Alisa Michelle Schreibman is an Adjunct Professor of Humanities at Rocky Mountain College of Art+Design and Front Range Community College. Her current research examines golems, *dybbuks*, and other Jewish monsters at the intersections of fairy tale, memory, and magical realism.

[View all of Alisa M. Schreibman's articles.](#)

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Review of *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai`i and Oceania* by Maile Arvin (Duke University Press)

by Christine Rosenfeld | Book Reviews, Issue 9.1 (Spring 2020)

ABSTRACT Arvin explains how dispossessing Polynesians was predicated on a logic of settler colonialism inflected by white supremacy. Casting Polynesians as white—specifically, as “almost white”—as opposed to distancing Polynesians from Caucasians, simultaneously provided white settlers the justification they needed to occupy large swaths of Oceania and precluded Polynesians from enjoying the full set of rights available to non-almost whites. By establishing a clear racial continuity between settlers and Polynesians, possession through whiteness made whiteness indigenous to the islands; doing so “suited [settlers’] own claims of belonging to Polynesia while [also soothing] colonizers’ racial anxieties about those they dispossessed.” Throughout the book, Arvin argues that anti-Blackness was as pronounced and as integral in possessing Polynesians as whiteness and calls for future research that more centrally examines the specific and nuanced functions of whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity in Melanesian and Micronesian contexts.

KEYWORDS anti-Blackness, Hawai`i, Polynesia, settler colonialism, whiteness

Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai`i and Oceania. By Maile Arvin. Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2019, 328 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978-1-4780-0633-6. US List: \$27.95.

Colonialism and settler colonialism are often associated with logics and practices of *exclusion* and *dispossession*, but Maile Arvin’s *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai`i and Oceania* argues that dispossessing Polynesians was and is predicated on a logic of *inclusion*, specifically a logic of settler colonialism inflected by white supremacy. Casting Polynesians as white—specifically as “almost white” (3)—as opposed to distancing Polynesians from Caucasians, simultaneously provided white settlers the justification they needed to occupy large swaths of Oceania and precluded Polynesians from enjoying the full set of rights available to non-almost whites. By establishing a clear racial continuity between settlers and Polynesians, possession through whiteness made whiteness indigenous to the islands; doing so “suited [settlers’] own claims of belonging to Polynesia while [also soothing] colonizers’ racial anxieties about those they dispossessed” (4). Throughout the book, Arvin argues that anti-Blackness was as pronounced and as integral in possessing Polynesians as whiteness and calls for future research that more centrally examines the specific and nuanced functions of whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity in Melanesian and Micronesian contexts.

The book, which has thorough chapter and section summaries throughout, is divided into two main parts. Part I is devoted to historicizing the logic of possession through whiteness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Part II is devoted to illustrating how possession through whiteness haunts Polynesians today and how individuals and communities act to unsettle this lingering possession.

Collectively, Arvin's dataset includes social scientific literature from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; transcripts of 1930s interviews and court case and hearing testimony; pop culture objects like the hula girl; and art. Her methodology draws on discourse analysis and the Indigenous feminist framework of regeneration. The latter is particularly pronounced in Part II and placed alongside the theorizations of Native American scholars, particularly Audra Simpson.

In Chapter 1, Arvin details how Western scientific literature from the nineteenth century dealt with "the Polynesian problem," which aimed to determine the origin of the Polynesian race by coding Indigenous Polynesians as Aryan settlers of the islands. Situating whiteness back in time in terms of Polynesian identity established the spatio-temporal continuity of whiteness among Polynesians that was necessary to make whiteness indigenous to Polynesia, thus justifying white settler colonialism and associated land occupations. However, the Polynesian-as-white narrative conveniently positioned Polynesians as degenerative due to their geographical isolation and therefore in need of restoration to their former Aryan glory. This aspect of the narrative explained the "almost" white character of Polynesians which legitimated their continued disenfranchisement in comparison to white settlers.

Chapter 2 outlines the work of physical anthropologists and eugenicists in the early twentieth century who collectively coded Polynesians as some degree of Caucasian—"conditionally Caucasian" (67)—in distinct opposition to the Black Melanesian race. Racial mixing between Polynesians and whites was viewed by some scientists as a way out of Indigenous degenerative existence and by others as a dilution of pure and celebrated Hawaiianess of times-past. Measuring Hawaiians' biological features provided evidence of similarity to Caucasians, while maintaining a 'just-enough' racial distance to the whiteness of settlers. Arvin shows how the work of these scientists forged the concept of part and full Hawaiian, which provides the foundation for continued possession through whiteness, as part Hawaiian can never fully reach the degree of whiteness necessary to dissolve settler power. She writes that "racial mixture was the discourse that allowed scientists to measure and ensure the progress of this possession [of Polynesians]" (206).

Chapter 3 takes up the familiar hula girl icon and pairs it alongside interview data of members of the public in Hawai'i from social scientists in the 1930s, an unlikely duo at first glance. While Arvin's analysis of over 200 interview transcripts from nearly 100 years ago is unique, its validity is of some concern for reasons she admits herself, including the time passed since the interviews and not knowing the exact questions asked. However, paired together, these two objects effectively reveal and represent the hatred *and* allure for Hawaiians that coexisted in the early to mid-twentieth century, a paradox that Arvin argues was made possible by the old standby: possession through whiteness. Across both datasets, it is the "almost" white, or mixed raced, trait of Polynesians that inspires disdain for Hawaiians perceived to be of the Black Melanesian type and lust for Hawaiians. It was precisely because of the Hawaiian girl's racial hybridity, which Arvin writes—echoing Tavia Nyong'o—encouraged white settler men to "think of themselves as experimental breeders,

doing their heterosexual reproductive duty for the United States in turning Hawai`i whiter" (118).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 advance the reader into the twenty-first century and while Arvin addresses her decision to gloss over the middle and late twentieth century, the time skip still feels a bit awkward and, in some ways, inconsistent with the first half of the book. Regardless, Part II instantly hooks the reader in both its shift towards envisioning Hawaiian futures that disrupt possession through whiteness and its orientation around familiar and contemporary legal cases, genomic projects, and art. These are Arvin's objects of analysis that she reads through the Indigenous feminist framework of regeneration, interpreting them as acts of refusal, and as such as unsettling possession through whiteness.

Chapter 4 complements knowledge that readers who are oriented with blood quantum laws in Hawai`i may already have. Arvin examines court transcripts from the *Day v. Apolina* case, revealing how Hawaiians' advocacy for stricter enforcement of blood quantum laws exemplifies how the logic of possession through whiteness lingers about—or, as Arvin says, haunts—contemporary Indigenous struggles. She contrasts this with the explicit rejection of blood quantum as expressed through testimony from Department of Interior hearings, which she interprets as an effective type of regenerative refusal—one that unmakes logics of possession through whiteness and as such contributes to decolonization and anticolonialism.

Chapter 5 reads like a direct follow-up to Part I in its important consideration of how the Polynesian Problem continues to influence contemporary genomic science through genetic mapping, direct-to-consumer genetic ancestry tests, and the Hawaiian Genome Project. Equally significant, however, is Arvin's attention to the various individual and collective refusals of genomic science, refusals that (re)define Indigeneity and Hawaiianness within Polynesian epistemologies and visions for the future. Arvin's commitment to contextualizing and broadening her own theorizations outside the Polynesian context is clear in her discussion of how objects like direct-to-consumer genetic ancestry tests may provide a very different kind of regenerative potential in some African American and Native American contexts than they do in the Polynesian realm.

Art is the canvas on which Arvin examines acts of refusal as regeneration in Chapter 6. She interprets the work of various artists as efforts to place Hawaiians in spaces from which they have been displaced by settler colonialism. She builds on the work of Jennifer Doyle and Audra Simpson to theorize how art serves as a means of disrupting possession through whiteness in addition to noting "an enjoyment accompanying a confident refusal of the assumption that Indigenous peoples are doomed to disappear and become the possessions of whiteness" (222).

Possessing Polynesians is a captivating read that casts science of times-past as (unfortunately) science of times-present. Scholars positioned within settler colonialism, Pacific studies, critical race studies, and women and gender studies will find the analysis in this book useful in contextualizing their own work and in signaling further pathways of research on which to embark. In showing how inclusion—as opposed to exclusion—can result in discursive and material violence, Arvin's book is also of use to scholars who do work on multiculturalism and recognition.

Author Information

Christine Rosenfeld

Christine Rosenfeld is an Assistant Professor of Geography at George Mason University (GMU). She received her doctorate in Cultural Studies from GMU, her M.S. degree in Geography from the Pennsylvania State University (PSU), and her B.A. degrees in Geography and Spanish from PSU. She is under contract with University of Nebraska Press for her first book which is based around her dissertation research regarding socio-cultural struggle in and about the Saddle region of the Big Island. Her other research pertains to the changing Arctic landscape and conflict early warning systems; she is part of an NSF-funded research team regarding this work. Previously, she has published articles related to research completed with the Smithsonian regarding digital volunteers and has presented at various national conferences about historical tourism landscapes in Cuba and contemporary struggle in Hawaii's Saddle. She currently teaches political geography, human geography, and major world regions.

[View all of Christine Rosenfeld's articles.](#)

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